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Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

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Aechmea spp.: Bromeliad, Aechmea, Vase Plant[1]

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https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/

This document is part of a series originally authored by Edward Gilman.

Introduction

Aechmea is a genus of plants commonly referred to as bromeliads, or vase plants, which contains over 250 species native to regions across tropical America. Aechmea is a vase-shaped epiphytic herbaceous perennial that has attractive silver, green, or variegated foliage, which differs depending upon the species (Figure 1). The spiny evergreen leaves are arranged in a basal rosette. An ornamentally showy flower stalk emerges from the rosette during the spring (Figure 2). The flower stalk is composed of a cluster of showy colorful bracts, and small purple-blue or yellow flowers are located within the bracts. It is the long-lasting bracts that are the most noticeable part of the flower stalk. These bracts come in a variety of colors including yellow, orange, red, pink, and combinations of these colors. The inflorescence makes for a long-lived addition in cut flower arrangements. This plant is excellent for use as a groundcover or mass planting, may be used in containers or above ground planters, or makes a suitable houseplant.



Figure 1. Full form—*Aechmea chantinii*: Amazonian zebra plant growing epiphytically on a tree.
Credit: Robert via Adobe Stock



Figure 2. Flower—*Aechmea fasciata*: silver urn bromeliad.
Credit: StepPro via Adobe Stock

General Information

Scientific name: *Aechmea* spp.

Pronunciation: eek-MEE-uh species

Common name(s): Aechmea, bromeliad, vase plant

Family: *Bromeliaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11B (Figures 3 and 4)

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

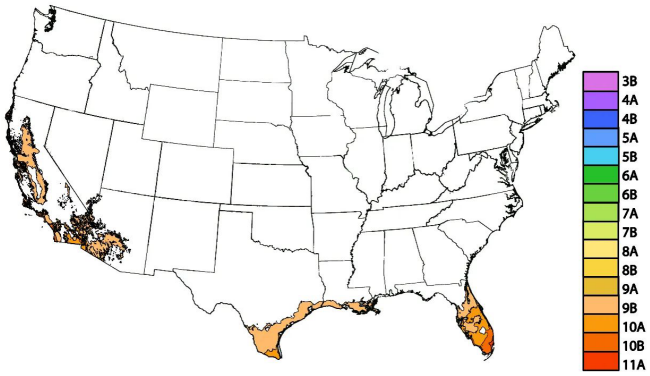


Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

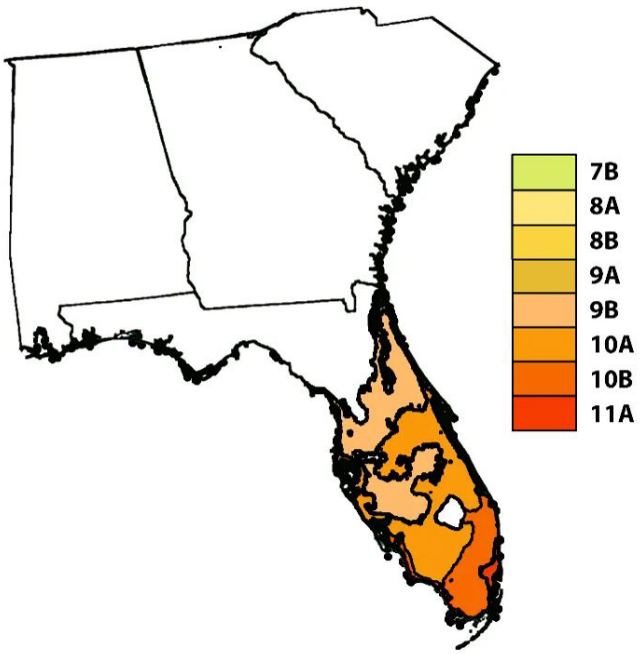


Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; groundcover; suitable for growing indoors

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet; dependent upon species

Spread: 1 to 2 feet; dependent upon species

Plant habit: vase shape

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: basal rosette

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: spiny or serrate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches

Leaf color: green; silver; bronze; variegated; dependent upon species

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: purple-blue; yellow

Flower characteristic: spring flowering; monocarpic (flowering once); produces small offshoot plants at base called pups

Fruit

Fruit shape: no fruit

Fruit length: no fruit

Fruit cover: no fruit

Fruit color: not applicable

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: usually with one stem/trunk

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; acidic; clay; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: poor

Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Aechmea grows best in partial shade in moisture-retentive but well-drained soil. It can also be successfully grown epiphytically, or without soil, with moss around its roots. To grow this plant epiphytically, attach it to the branches of rough-barked trees where its cupped rosette will catch the water it needs. A groundcover or mass planting of this bromeliad in front of a green-foliaged shrub grouping provides a bright accent for a partially shaded spot. The plants should be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart for an effective groundcover. This plant also makes an excellent container plant or houseplant. Bromeliads are tough plants that require minimal care and are very drought tolerant once they become established.

Plants are monocarpic, flowering only once before desiccating. Plants often produce offshoot plants called pups. Pups may be planted elsewhere or left in place. Propagation is by division of the offsets or by seed.

Design Considerations

The bold form and coarse texture of the bromeliad make it perfect for containers and highly visible spaces in the landscape. Use with plants that are softer with small foliage and mounding or spreading forms. Pair with plants that have more texture in the foliage to contrast with the smooth leaves of the bromeliad. Use plants with no flowers or small to medium flowers with cool bright colors to contrast with the bright red and orange. Complementary colors include cool colors such as purples and blues. Use large masses of companion plants around the base or in front of the bromeliads when they are planted in a mass.

Pests and Diseases

Pest issues include scale. No diseases of major concern.

Root rot is a problem if the soil is kept too moist. No irrigation is needed to maintain the plants once they are established. Other problems include mosquitoes, which may breed in the trapped water in the leaves. Flush the cups, or interior spaces where water gathers, if mosquitoes become an issue in the landscape.

Table 1. Common *Aechmea* species and their traits.

Species	Image	Size (H x W)	Traits
Aechmea blanchetiana: orangeade bromeliad		2–4' H x 1–4' W	Orangeade bromeliad is a larger *Aechmea* species, notable for its bright orange evergreen leaves
Aechmea chantinii: Amazonian zebra plant		1–3' H x 2–3' W	Notable for highly variegated green and light-yellow foliage, produces a showy flower spike
Aechmea gamosepala: matchstick bromeliad		1–1.5’ H x 1–2' W	Notable for the pink and purple match-like inflorescence
Aechmea distichantha: Brazilian vase plant		2-3' H x 1-2' W	This species has narrow leaves and a salmon-colored flower spike

Species	Image	Size (H x W)	Traits
Aechmea fasciata: silver vase plant		1-3' H x 1-2' W	Notable for foliage variegated with silvery bands and large pink flower spikes

Credits: *Aechmea blanchetiana*: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS; *Aechmea chantinii*: Robert via Adobe Stock; *Aechmea gamosepala*: Angela via Adobe Stock; *Aechmea distichantha*: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS; *Aechmea fasciata*: vrabelpeter1 via Adobe Stock

[1] This document is FPS14, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised November 2017 and October 2025. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/ for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/*.

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