

Morphology

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Hence, botanically their flowers are not "perfect" (very rarely, both sexes appear on one **INFLORESCENS**, or flowering structure.) And the sexes are **DIMORPHIC**, two different shapes. The male Croton flower is a round, fuzzy flower about 3/8 of an inch in diameter and looks like a tiny mimosa flower. The female is an equally small flower, but resembles a vase with three curved hairs, the **STIGMAS** sticking out on the end.

Two imperfect inflorescence, called **RACEMES**, arise from a **NODE** or leaf-stem junction point near the tip of the Croton branch. They are enclosed at their bases by a cup-shaped, short leaf called a **BRACT**. The female raceme comes out first and the flowers are **POLLINATED** by the **POLLEN** from the male bloom. The result is a **CAPSULE** containing three **SEEDS**. About the time the seeds mature, the male raceme in the same bract develops, opens its flowers and sheds pollen. This difference in timing insures **CROSS POLLINATION** from a different branch if not a totally different plant. The female capsule explodes when mature, sending the seeds flying for several feet. These often germinate and volunteer Croton seedlings are not rare. Many Crotons in old landscapes are the results of this unobtrusive replacement of declining parent plants. This adds loads of fun when we try to identify the old named **CULTIVARS**, the correct name of **HYBRID** plants and often-abbreviated cv.

Natural pollination by different insects does happen. Ants, houseflies, syrphid flies, mosquitoes, small wasps and wild bees have all been seen on Croton flowers. However, when natural or artificial pollination does occur and a seedling develops, they rarely look anything like the parents.

The best time to artificially pollinate Crotons is early in the morning when the dew helps adhere the pollen to the

female **STIGMAS**. The freshest male flowers are checked for pollen by dusting them against the back of your hand or scanning them with a magnifying hand lens. If they fall off at your touch, they are at or just past peak pollen production. Entire male flowers are then picked and brushed on the female flowers as soon as possible after the females open. **RECEPTIVE** female flowers may have sticky stigmas. You can see the pollen sticking to the three curved hairs in the dew or at any time of the day you find a receptive female flower. If you are lucky, the female flower will begin to swell, as you may expect, and within seven to fourteen days, the capsules will begin exploding.

Trap the flying seeds by covering the raceme with stapled gauze or nylon stocking material. Author J. R. Renfro uses plastic window screen sewn together into a sleeve. Plant the seeds immediately, then relax. Most seedlings will not really show their true colors before four to seven years. Mr. Renfro has made about thirty named cultivars and has hundreds of seedlings growing, while Mr. McLean has a whopping three!

Some Croton cultivars flower and set seed more easily than others. In Central Florida, 'Madame Fernand Kohl', 'Yellow Duke of Windsor' (= 'Marigold'), and 'Caution Light' are prolific bloomers. In South Florida, 'General Paget', 'Stoplight', 'Rheedi' and 'General MacArthur' always have flower and set seed continually.

Selecting a "pair" of Crotons for **CROSSING** and doing the pollination isn't always easy. Both plants must be in bloom simultaneously...and the female must be "in the mood"...so to speak. In other life forms, one can take a cold shower and try again later. In many plants, the pollen can often be stored and the **CROSS** made later. Not so with Crotons. It is difficult to save pollen from a selected "sire" for your next creation. The usual method, storing in a refrigerator doesn't seem to work. Perhaps commercial vacuum packing may be the answer.

Finding ways to enjoy Crotons is the objective of our Society. Propagation by cutting and air layering, even grafting, are ways to **VEGETATIVELY CLONE** or duplicate a specific cultivar. Occasionally, a Croton will branch into a new form on a known cv. These variations are called **SPORTS** or mutations and, if attractive and stable, can be named as new cultivars. Seeking random seedlings and making **CROSSES** or **HYBRIDS** is a more intimate and exciting way to experience the Croton disease and you can name them yourself. A friend of Mr. McLean's, Terry Hamilton, found a seedling of his 'Irene Kingsley' that is a spectacular new red. He named it 'My Croton'.

The craze to create new Crotons has swept through the horticulture in several time periods. Dr. Frank Brown wonderfully describes these eras and the cultivars that appeared in them in his book, *Crotons of the World*. The hybridizing craze is going on again, mostly in Thailand. Why not help them out a bit? Why not diddle *your* Crotons?

Bender's Influence

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"I guess if I had to pick just one, it would be **Rudy Bachman**. It grows well, gives all kinds of color and has big, textured leaves. It always looks nice."

"I also like **Gensenii**," he added, explaining that it is the *true* red corkscrew. It is extremely slow growing, but the results are beautiful. His favorite shade dwelling *Codiaeum* is **Polychrome**, followed by **Rubens** and **Raphael**. He likes the pastels, the delicate purples and soft yellows.

For Collectors

Some suggestions for our personal collections include: **Sybil Griffin** (when in good form, but is "not consistent"); **William Craig** ("beautiful with fantastic colors, there is no wood on it, so it is difficult to air layer and slow to root"); **Diane** (an overall "fantastic" variety); **Columbiana** ("always has