

Puyas in the UC Botanical Garden

Towering over the Garden's South American Area are three members of the genus *Puya*, which have a unique type of inflorescence. The genus *Puya* contains over 200 terrestrial bromeliad species ranging from Central America south through the Andes to Chile. These plants are adapted to thrive in extremely harsh conditions in the wild.

Like other bromeliads, they are monocarpic, meaning that the parent plant dies after blooming, although they generally produce offsets or 'pups' from the base. The name puya is derived from an indigenous Mapuche word that means point, and if you've ever worked around puyas you know how treacherous it can be to encounter their spines!

There are 16 different kinds of *Puya* in the garden, though some are not yet large enough to be planted out from the nursery. They are mostly from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru, with a few from Colombia, Costa Rica, and Ecuador.

Former Garden Director Bob Ornduff explained the origins of the Garden's *Puya chilensis* and *P. berteroniana* (now *Puya alpestris* ssp. *zoellneri*), in a 1990 *Garden Newsletter* stating, "I collected the seed that gave rise to these plants in Chile in February, 1983, from somewhat wizened parents that had flowered months previously. A little over seven years later, the next generation produced a marvelous display of flowers many thousands of miles away from home."



Puya alpestris ssp. *zoellneri* are quite dramatic in and of themselves but their flowers are unforgettable. The inflorescence is typically 2-4 meters tall with many side-branches. The lower part of each branch is densely packed with large flowers of an incredible metallic blue-green color, which contrasts strikingly with the orange pollen. Flowering time is spring with blooms lasting for several months.



Just up the path from *Puya alpestris* ssp. *zoellneri* is another striking plant, *puya chilensis*. The striking chartreuse flowers are surreal and unforgettable.



Blooming nearby is a stand of *P. coerulea* var. *intermedia*. *P. coerulea* var. *intermedia*.

Directions to these *Puya* species

