

MORE ON SPANISH MOSS



by Bert T. Foster

In reference to the article on "Spanish Moss" in the November 1982 issue of the Palmetto, I would like to add a few additional points of interest and an opinion or two.

Tillandsia usneoides was named for a famous Swedish botanist by the name of Tilland who never saw the plant.

'usne' - is a lichen that hangs from the trees in the State of Washington as well as other states.

'oides' - means resembling.

Thus '*Tillandsia usneoides*'.

While it is true that Spanish moss does not kill trees as stated in the November issue, I am sure that ball moss (*Tillandsia recurvata*) does contribute to the demise of many live oak trees by growing so thick that the tree is literally choked to death by restricting the new growth.

I have noticed several trees of late that I feel sure were killed by the *recurvata*. The *recurvata* has taken over since the *usneoides* died out a few years ago. The *recurvata* needed more light which it now has by the absence of *usneoides*.

My Father, Mulford B. Foster, discovered that when the seeds of *usneoides* germinate, the new seedlings have roots which later die as the plant gets larger; from that point on it continues to grow without roots. The article he wrote about it was titled "Scientific Fact Uprooted" published in Bromeliad Bulletin, Volume I, July/August, 1981, #4.

Pollution has been blamed for killing great quantities of Spanish moss several years ago, but I am of the opinion that it was a virus.

Another means of harvesting Spanish moss other than the one mentioned in the article was to hang the Spanish moss on long racks and then kill it with live steam. After the gray exterior dropped off, the black fiber was then sold by the pound for use in car seats, etc.

Spanish moss has a fragrant, light green flower. The flower starts to open between 4-6 in the afternoon and blooms during the night.

Last of all, according to a conversation I had with Dr. Lyman Smith, I believe he told me (hope I am not getting in trouble on this point) that *Tillandsia usneoides* is one of the most sophisticated and youngest of the bromeliads.