

HERALD
TODAY IN
OUR INTERNET
EDITION
FRED TASKER
ON CALL

TROPICAL LIFE



BUTTERFLY GLOW: BLC Campabello 'Mendehaf', a Cattleya hybrid.



VELVET TEXTURE: *Arthurium magnificum* leaf has ivory veins.



STRIKING: *Guzmania bromeliad* thrives in shade house.

doctoring NATURE

Science serves beauty in Dr. Jeff Block's extraordinary garden



PLANT DOCTOR: Jeffrey Block stands with his Molucca cockatoo, in front of a red sealing wax palm, top. Above, golden bamboo contrasts with black bamboo.

It's hard to say what plant in Jeff Block's collection is the most beautiful, because each is riveting. Those clinging to the stone wall beneath a screen enclosure, visible from the family room and kitchen, are some of nature's most handsome specimens — far surpassing what can be found in the wild because nature doesn't mind holes in her leaves or a few bugs.

But Block does. An anesthesiologist, Block manages these plants as if

they were patients, tending to their every need and comfort. Perfecting the skills he has honed as a physician, he incorporates the same attention to detail — coupled with sophisticated watering and fertilizing techniques — to make his garden glow.

Giant philodendrons, rare palms and glorious ferns are practically purring in contentment. Given their southern exposure beneath a screen, sheltered from wind and bathed in

beauties have every reason to be fat and happy.

Outside, flowering trees, fruit trees, palms and orchids are just as prosperous and self-satisfied. Never mind that they withstand rain, wind and heat. They manage it with grace.

The price these princely plants extract, in turn, is complete devotion. Maybe even obsession.

Hottest ticket at fund-raisers? Celebrity chefs' latest cuisine

BY APRIL WITT
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Food at charity events used to be Cringe Cuisine — soggy cocktail tidbits followed by rubber chicken and limp green beans amidst.

Today, it's just as likely to be the handwork of culinary stars showing off their virtuoso cooking. Big-name chefs are one of the hottest drawing cards in fund-raising — a field that will be celebrated on Wednesday, National Philanthropy Day.

"It's become a very successful way of raising money for a lot of good causes," said Allen Sussner of Chef Al-

len's inventura, who chairs the oldest chefs' charity event in South Florida, Share Our Strength, and donates his time to several others.

"A star cast of chefs brings out the best in people. There is a romance in knowing the chef, seeing the chef and talking to the chef."

The National Football League, for example, holds a black tie fund-raiser the night before the Super Bowl featuring the work of one chef from each city with an NFL team. This year, the Taste of the NFL raised \$600,000 for



CHRISTOPHER LOWELL: TV star expanding home-decor empire.

He's a practical Martha Stewart

► **Christopher Lowell** Show, noon and 3 p.m. Monday-Friday, Discovery Channel.

BY MARLA MATZER
Los Angeles Daily News

LOS ANGELES — Basic-look gray carpeting, faux wood paneling, Martha Stewart wouldn't be caught dead in this place. That's just fine with Christopher Lowell, a top pop decorator and king of the Discovery Channel with his Christopher Lowell Show.

An eight-hour marathon of the re-



HELPERS: Allen Sussner and daughter Deanna at the Taste of the NFL.

<p>INSIDE</p> <p>HOLIDAY PREVIEW</p> <p>OUR THANKSGIVING STORY and recipes will run next week, but for a preview, complete with shopping tips, see Page 6K.</p>	<p>FOOD & HOME</p> <p>COOK'S CORNER 5K MUCHO GUSTO 5K WINE 7K</p>	<p>ANN LANDERS 2K PETS 4K HOME TECH 4K</p>	<p>EPICURE ROW</p> <p>THE FOOD OF MIAMI is one of the cookbooks featured next weekend at the Miami Book Fair International, see Page 6K.</p>	<p>MIAMI</p>

IN THE GARDEN



BLOCK'S PLANTS

Among the plants in Dr. Jeff Block's collection:

- **Vriesea 'Red Chestnut.'** This lovely, thornless bromeliad has irregular banding, called tessellation. It loves bright light, but not direct sun.
- **Neoregelia 'Tassion' hybrid.** This hot red bromeliad like bright light, but not direct sun.
- **BLC Campabello 'Mendehaf.'** A low Cattleya hybrid has a butter yellow lip, just brushed with red on the edge. About 30 percent shade. Block grows orchids hanging above the bromeliads in one shade house so the orchids receive more light, while bromeliads get about 30 percent shade.
- **Vanda hybrids.** These orchids, grown in full sun on pieces of cork wrapped around PVC pipe, are shaded in the mid- and late afternoon. Southeastern breezes provide plenty of air.
- **Copernicia macroglossa,** Cuban petticoat palm. This slow growing palm is distinctive with its stiff, upward pointing leaves that begin to bend toward the mid-trunk and hang as a skirt around the bottom.
- **Cryptotachys randa,** sealing wax palm. The red crown sheath, particularly when the tree is young, makes it one of the most beautiful palms. It is quite cold sensitive.

GROWING TIPS

SOIL
Start with 30 percent Canadian peat moss; 30 percent green pine bark; 20 percent coarse silica sand; 10 percent perlite; 10 percent cypress mulch.

To each cubic yard of soil, add the following nutrients: 5 pounds Per 1 minor nutrient mix; 3 pounds triple super phosphate; 4 pounds magnesium sulfate; 5 pounds dolomite.

GRANULAR FERTILIZER
Trees and shrubs receive applications the first week of January, May and September.

8-4-2 special palm fertilizer is applied to all palms, fruit trees, flowering trees and shade trees as well as cycads and bamboo. Apply 1 pound per square foot of trunk diameter.

8-4-21 palm special fertilizer also is applied to aroids, heliconias, ferns, shrubs and ground covers at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet of planting bed.

FOLIAR SPRAY

All plants are sprayed in December, February, April, June, August and October with the following ingredients mixed into a 100-gallon sprayer: tank filled with reverse-osmosis water; 12 ounces Dynagro (7-7-7 April through October); 2-4 in December and February; 12 ounces Superthru; 12 ounces Kexplex (for minor nutrients); 4 ounces Phyac. Block then mists in 12 ounces of Pure-Jel, a silica product.

CONTAINERIZED PLANTS

The first week of January all containerized plants get an application of 360-day Nutricote 1F-79-8 in amounts appropriate to the container size.

GARDEN NEWS

MEETINGS

The **YMCA of South Broward County Garden Club** will meet at 7:30 p.m. Monday at the YMCA, 3561 Taff St., Hollywood. Information: 954-989-9622.

The **South Florida Orchid Society** will meet at 7:30 p.m. on Friday at Florida's Fire Fighters Memorial Building, 8000 NW 27th St., Miami. Information: 305-255-3556.

EVENTS

Beginning Wednesday, **Fairchild Tropical Garden**, 13001 SW 68th Ave., Coral Gables, will offer a free guided walking tour at various times during the week. They include: Native Plant Tour featuring South Florida plants; The Montgomery Palm Tour displaying 900 palm species; and The Midamer Flowering Tree Arboretum Tour, featuring 10 acres of 740 tropical flowering tree species. Guided tours are 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; and 1:30 p.m. Wednesday and Sunday. Admission is \$8 adults, Members and children 12 and under free. Information: 305-448-8057.

The **Eastern Airlines Orchid Club** will hold its annual Orchid and Plant Auction at 7 a.m. Friday at Florida International University, Southwest EIGHT Street at 12th Avenue, in Room 0234, near the greenhouse. Information: 305-448-8057.

The **Broward County Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society** will hold a Fall Yards Tour of member's homes from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday. Information: 954-525-0268.

A passion for plants

land, N.Y., he has lived in Miami-Dade County for 30 years, departing only for his undergraduate days at Emory University in Atlanta. His medical degree is from the University of Miami.

For the last decade, Block has lived in a home on an acre in South Miami. His passion for plants began with bromeliads because they were easy to care for when he lived in a townhouse.

He joined the Bromeliad Society and served two terms as its president, learning how to grow and show prize-winning plants.

Then, "I really got into everything else all at once."

Palms, aroids, ferns, bromeliads, orchids, flowering and fruit trees, succulents, vines, all look as if they stepped from the pages of coffee table books.

Plants on the screen-covered patio include a giant finlet fern called Angiopteris polymorpha; two handsome *Joyas* palms, *Johannestejmannia magnifica* and *J. olivifera*; and a cluster of sealing wax palms with strong, deep-red trunks.

Because Block has developed a knack for garden showmanship, orchids bloom on the trunks of many palms and trees, and ground covers and potted plants are placed to accentuate other colors or textures. To show off the white rings the cabada palm has on its blue-green trunk, he put it in a 52-inch diameter pot.

FIRST, BROMELIADS
Block, 43, has worked South Miami Hospital for 12 years. Originally from Long

Island, N.Y., he has lived in Miami-Dade County for 30 years, departing only for his undergraduate days at Emory University in Atlanta. His medical degree is from the University of Miami.

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BLOOM TIME: A floss silk tree, top, in Jeff Block's garden is pruned after Hurricane Irene by Jorge Gamarra. It blooms faithfully every year at Halloween. A Cuban petticoat palm, middle, catches light on its stiff, corrugated fronds. The ragsberry red bromeliad, above, is a *Neoregelia 'Passion'* hybrid that Block grows in a shade house.

north side of the yard, and fruiting trees and shrubs along the south side. An island in the middle, with curving bed lines, holds rare palms, native vines, oaks and palmettos.

His flowering trees include 'Little Gem' magnolia, a Jamaican rain tree, three cannonball trees and a thorny floss silk that is covered with huge pink flowers this time of year.

Terrence Walters, executive director of the Montgomery Botanical Center, said after a recent visit to Block's garden, "Talk about perfect specimens... That *Christia* (floss silk tree) ... we have some small specimens, and I just know they'll never be that beautiful."

His citrus have five or six

cultivars grafted onto each tree. Carambolas, miracle fruit, and variegated bananas are interplanted with such flowering shrubs as angel's trumpet and salmon-colored butterfly gniers.

Clearly a palm lover, Block carefully tends a triple planting of the old man, *Coccothrinax crinita*; a talipot, *Copernicia umbraulifera*, which produces the largest flower stalk among plants; and a dramatic Cuban petticoat palm, *Copernicia macroglossa*. *Borassus*, *Gastrococos*, *Palagopodia* and *Surakentia* palms are in his collection, too.

Palms selected to accent his front door are chubby bottle palms, *Hyporhche legeriancaulis*, while a group of four spiny zombie palms, *Zombia amil-*



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Photos by CHARLES TRAINER / HERALD STAFF

um, keep to themselves a few feet away.

To color the edges of his central island, Block uses bromeliads in terra cotta pots. These can be moved back into a shade house when flower stalks have faded.

The shade houses are small but well thought out. Overhead irrigation sprays the aroids, orchids and bromeliads with reverse osmosis water when it gets too hot, shutting off automatically when a cooler setting is reached.

From December to March, Block wraps the houses in plastic, leaving the north and south sides open until it gets cold. At 40 degrees, an under-bench mist system sprays warm ground water to raise the temperature one degree every three minutes, shutting off when the thermometer reads 50 degrees.

Because he is a serious grower, Block is disappointed that his efforts to donate unusual plants — his own and those of other South Florida growers — to the U.S. Botanic Garden have been declining.

That garden is undergoing a major renovation.

Rob Pennington, manager of the conservatory, said Block's offer, made in 1997, was late in the project, but "Jeff's been wonderfully helpful in directing us to sources."

Meanwhile, Block is saving a sausage tree for the garden in a 200-gallon tub, in case it may one day be useful.