

Orthophytum 'Warren Loose' Revisited

by Ross Stenhouse

The handling characteristics of *Orthophytum* 'Warren Loose' could easily be described as severe. I have been handling quite a number of plants whilst photographing them and 'Warren Loose' always manages to wound me. However, in the plant's favour is its splendour.

This plant has been 'looking good' for the nine months of so I have had it on loan from Bob Reilly. The plant is very popular and is widely grown.

This plant is terrestrial in its nature. By that I mean it is grown in a sand mixture, rather than the open bark and charcoal mixture we use for many of the other species bromeliads. The photographs opposite show inflorescence and flowers.

The plant has small white flowers about 3-4 mm in diameter. These flowers close up in the evening. New flowers seem to grow fairly regularly, but there is not a lot at one time, maybe about 2 or 3.

The texture of the leaves is very interesting. They are 'furry' in feel and look and very stiff with 'gotya' spines along their edges.

Orthophytum 'Warren Loose' is a cultivar of *Orthophytum gurkenii*. Apparently in 1987 Bob Whitman grew seed from *Orthophytum gurkenii* and had a varied bunch of seedlings. Allegedly, in 1996 he named one really scurfy leaved one after his boyfriend Warren Loose. It is believed that he named it so as a memorial.

The plant produces offsets a number of ways; the photograph opposite shows just how determined the plant can be to further its genes. It's not often that an offset decides to grow through the bottom of the pot. Offsets are more conventionally thrown from the base of the plant at the ground line and also the inflorescence heads. Derek Butcher advises that "Regarding offsetting, the ones from the base of the plant - invariably on underground stolons (or are they rhizomes?) are the easiest to propagate. The ones that occur adventitiously in the inflorescence are more of a challenge"

Orthophytum gurkenii. is described as "solitary with short, thick caudex, the sterile plants mostly up to 15 cm. tall and 25 cm. in diameter, larger in shade, somewhat smaller in the wild, especially when in full sun, the leaves suberect to spreading. Flowering plant 90 cm. tall leaves to 25 cm. long and 4.5 cm. wide, shallowly and broadly canaliculate, spreading, arching recurved or the uppermost on the inflorescence deflexed, with a distinct sheath enfolding the stem, the blades broadly triangular-attenuate, laxly spinose with teeth up to 2.5 mm. long, deep purplish or purplish brown, irregularly and sparsely white lepidote beneath, above white lepidote in straight, wavy, or irregular to jagged lines mostly 2- 3 mm. wide extending to the margins or nearly (zebra-striped), alternating with glabrous zones about 5 mm. wide" (Hutchison: 1983)

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References

ORTHOPHYTUM GURKENII P. C. Hutchison, *Phytologia*, 52(6):373-5. 1983

Cultivar: A plant produced in cultivation as opposed to one growing in habitat: a horticultural clone or strain. A plant type within a cultivated species that has recognisably different characteristics.

Scurf: The hairs of an epidermis when stellate or scalew-like.

Rhizome: an underground root-bearing stem, the apex of which progressively sends up leafy shoots.