Introduction

This large, spiny-leaved bromeliad forms impressive clumps of wavy, 12 to 16-inch-long foliage, spreading slowly by underground stems, making it ideal for use as a groundcover or living fence (due to the spiny leaves) (Fig. 1). A person will walk through a mass planting of this only once. In late spring to early summer the center leaves turn a bright scarlet and from this center arises a flower spike composed of rose-colored flowers edged with white, making a dramatic landscape accent.

General Information

Scientific name: Bromelia balansae
Pronunciation: bro- MEEL-ee-uh bal-AN-see
Common name(s): Bromeliad, Heart-of-Flame
Family: Bromeliaceae
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; ground cover; mass planting; border; suitable for growing indoors; accent
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet
Spread: 4 to 6 feet
Plant habit: upright; round

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: basal rosette
Leaf type: simple
**Leaf margin:** spiny  
**Leaf shape:** linear  
**Leaf venation:** parallel  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** more than 36 inches  
**Leaf color:** purple or red  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** red  
**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round  
**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch  
**Fruit cover:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** unknown  
**Fruit characteristic:** showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branch:** usually with one stem/trunk

**Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable  
**Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; acidic; alkaline; loam  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown  
**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** not applicable  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
**Invasive potential:** may self-seed each year  
**Pest resistance:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant
Use and Management

Easily grown in full sun to light shade, Heart-of-Flame’s main requirement is good soil drainage. Plant on two to three-foot centers for a thick, tropical-looking ground cover. A mass planting in front of a shrub border will draw attention.

The leaves of the cultivar ‘Variegata’ have white margins.

Propagation is by division of the offsets or by seed.

Heart-of-Flame may be bothered by scale.

Pests and Diseases

Root rots in poorly drained soils.