

Let's Talk *Crotons*

BY ANDREW BRITTEN

Boasting impressive durability and vibrant color, this plant category deserves a spot on your bench.

Clockwise from bottom left: 'Eberneum', 'Wilma' and 'Nervia'.

Crotons, *Codiaem variegatum*, have been around for a very long time. They were first discovered and reported on by G.E. Rumphius back in 1653 on the Mollucan Island of Aboina. In the 1920s, breeding of crotons in North America started to emphasize characteristics such as larger leaf sizes, improved coloration and form.

Breeding continued in the 1950s, developing many new plants in Thailand. In the 1970s, more breeding was introduced from Europe. Today there are countless varieties of croton available both commercially and for the collector.

Crotons are produced for their vibrant color and not for their insignificant inflorescence. Depending on the variety, the leaves have colors including reds, oranges, greens, whites, purples and yellows. The coloration of the leaves varies based on the light intensity. The leaf shape varies from linear to ovate.

They are a tropical plant and will not take a freeze, often dropping leaves when temperatures fall into the 30s, and happiest between 65 and 90° F degrees. They are used heavily in the landscape in tropical areas and as houseplants or patio plants in cooler regions.

Crotons fall into the family Euphorbiaceae and as such secrete latex. This latex has been known to cause skin irritation for some people, so it is important to know your sensitivity to it.

Crotons are definitely a category of plants that have many different uses.

PRODUCTION AND PROPAGATION

As with most plants, there are issues for them with both disease and insect pressure. The most common disease issues to watch out for are Xanthomonas and Anthracnose. The most common pest problems are mites, mealybugs and scale.

Propagation of crotons is done by cuttings. Typically, stock is produced at offshore farms in tropical regions to maximize year-round production of the plants. Cuttings root in roughly eight weeks on thick leaf varieties and closer to four weeks on the soft foliage varieties.

During the mist cycle, it is important to keep the plants turgid. Low amounts of water with



Variety	4 inch	6 inch	1 Gallon	2 Gallon
'Excellente'	10 weeks	15 weeks	20 weeks	26 weeks
'Gold Dust'	10 weeks	14 weeks	n/a	n/a
'Mamey'	10 weeks	15 weeks	20 weeks	26 weeks
'Petra'	10 weeks	15 weeks	20 weeks	26 weeks

wilted leaves will definitely result in leaf drop from the cuttings.

CLASSIFYING CROTONS

Crotons are typically divided into eight different categories based upon the structure of the leaves.

- Broad Leaf.** This is the category in which we find 'Petra'. The leaves are broad and elliptical. This is generally a large croton category.
- Interrupted Leaf.** The leaf blade will taper down to the midrib for around an inch and then return back to the previous width.
- Narrow Leaf.** These leaves are typically strap-like and range from 2 to 4 inches wide and 8 to 16 inches in length.
- Oak Leaf.** As the name states, these resemble three-lobed oak leaves.
- Recurved Leaf.** The leaves in this variety will curl back on themselves. These are not very common.
- Semi Oak Leaf.** These are lobed similar to the regular oak leaf, but are typically asymmetrical.
- Small Leaf.** The leaves in this category are generally less than 2 inches in length.
- Spiral Leaf.** The leaves here are twisted like a corkscrew. 'Dreadlocks' is one of the most common varieties in this group.

The most popular variety out there is 'Petra', although 'Gold Dust', 'Mamey' and 'Excellente' are also well used in the market. Please see chart

below for estimated crop times on each of these.

Although sales are predominantly on the four above varieties, there are several hundred interesting options available as well. Some other interesting varieties worth taking a look at are as follows, but by no means a complete list.

AFD-5	'Nervia'
'Aurora'	'Norma'
'Banana'	'Paintbrush'
'Congo'	'Pie Crust'
'Dread Locks'	'Sunny Star'
'Eberneum'	'Wilma'
'Eleanor Roosevelt'	'Yellow Iceton'
'Franklin Roosevelt'	'Yellow Mamey'
'Golden Bell'	'Guayaba'
'Iceton'	'Yellow Petra'
'Magnificent'	'Zanzibar'

Crotons are definitely a category of plants that have many different uses. From houseplants to hedges, they are showing up all over the country. They can bring some durable and vibrant color to your garden or home. The typical croton colors are perfect for fall combinations as well, matching the fall colors of deciduous trees except all within the same leaf. If you have not yet added these to your mix, you are missing out! [gpn](#)

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