

## Croton Come Back

By: Luis Llenza

Thanks to their dazzling array of foliage, crotons, an old fashioned favorite of south Florida gardeners, are finding new popularity in contemporary landscapes. Planted in full sun, they are easy to maintain with regular fertilizing and minimum watering.

Crotons are a type of Euphorbia with leaf colors that range from orange to red to pink and purple, yellow to yellowish green and even whitish green. Leaf shapes can be oblong, curly and round, or long, thin and spindly.

Use one of these ornamental beauties as a specimen plant for drama in the garden. Or plant them in multiples to define yard areas, create privacy or camouflage unsightly utility boxes. Croton 'Batik' has a hand painted look, Croton 'Gold Dust' is distinguished by the small gold specks on each leaf and Croton 'Warrenii' is known for its spindly, open pod leaf.

Crotons truly are workhorses in a landscape. They can serve as transition plants from lawn to walkways or between lawn and ground cover in sunny areas. Wherever you plant them, these richly colored shrubs will not disappoint. Add texture and artistry with a 'Fred Sander' croton, whose elongated pinnate leaves with a green and yellow linear pattern add a contemporary look to the garden. Select the green and yellow, deltoid-shaped "Mona Lisa" and also the brightly colored yellow and red ovate leaves of Croton "Gloriosa" for dramatic impact in the yard. Another good choice is Croton 'Jan Bier', with its distinctive leaf patterned like a yellow-jacket bee in stripes of yellow and green.

For mass planting areas, use shrubby crotons like the red, orange and green 'Crispum', the deep red hues of Croton 'Mammey' or my new favorite, 'Majesticum' which sports a pom-pom like array of garnet and gold leaves.

Highlight an entry court or anchor a corner of the house with one of these specimens: 'Rubrum' with arrowhead-shaped, pink-to-red and green leaves; 'Imperialis' with water-color shades of faded orange and red; 'Picturatum' with a green leaf bisected with yellow; or the 'Recurvifolium' whose curly leaves can be green, yellow and red.