

## Spanish Moss in My Pina Colada

Written by Will Balk, Jr.

Tuesday, 04 November 2014 12:53 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 November 2014 07:57

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If you have any sense at all (as my mother used to say), you would never take a good long look at Spanish Moss, that great ghostly symbol of the Deep South, and have images of sweet Hawaiian fruit or brilliant-flowered house plants pop into your mind. That's just crazy.

Well, maybe it's not so crazy after all. All three are members of the Bromeliad family – the draping grey threads of Spanish Moss; the pineapple; and potted bromeliads found in garden centers and grocery stores year round, those plants with the intensely colored foliage and flower bracts.

All three are flowering plants. Although the sometimes garish bromeliads in pots seem to be showing off their flowers, the actual flowers are often much smaller than the colorful bracts hiding them. Pineapple fruit forms from the hundreds of tiny flowers within the crown of the plant. And, believe it or not, Spanish Moss makes flowers, too – tiny flowers emerge from the axils where the grey threads branch.

Take a close look at Spanish Moss sometime, using a little hand magnifying glass; it gets really interesting. You may first notice that it actually is a green plant – the grey color comes from the very tiny scales covering the outside of each green thread-like leaf. When the moss is wet, the grey is minimized and the green is made more readily visible. You will likely find the seed cases more often than the flowers.

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