



Heinrich Gustav Adolph Engler 1844-1930

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A Prodigious Aroid Worker

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It's difficult to contemplate aroids without thinking of the amazing productivity of Adolph Engler. Aside from H. C. Schott (*Aroideana*, Vol. 1 [3]), no other worker is so clearly associated with the aroid family. His active writing on Araceae spanned 42 years beginning in 1878 with the publication of the Araceae of Brazil in Martius' *Flora Brasiliensis* and ending in 1920 with the completion of a monographic treatment of the entire aroid family. The latter work published in *Das Pflanzenreich* was the last comprehensive treatment of the family. All together it describes about 1,800 species in 108 genera. The work, though now out of date, still stands as a monument to his untiring efforts.

Engler was born March 25, 1844, in Sargans, Lower Silesia (a former Prussian Province now partly Poland and partly Czechoslovakia), as the son of a shopkeeper. After his father died he was taken to Breslau by his mother where his teachers encouraged his natural interest in botany. Even as a boy he associated with important German botanists and after finishing his doctorate in 1866 at the University of Breslau he obtained a post as a teacher of mathematics and natural history at his old primary school, the Magdalenen Gymnasium. From 1873 until 1878 he worked at the University of Munich where he completed the treatments of 15 different families for the "*Flora Brasiliensis*." It was during this period that he developed his interest and expertise with the family Araceae. From 1878 until 1884 he held the chair of Botany at the University of Kiel and then spent five years at his old Alma Mater, the University of

Breslau. It was not until 1889 following the death of the famous botanist Eichler in Berlin that Engler took charge of what was rapidly becoming the world's center of taxonomic research. In Berlin he became Professor of Botany at the University of Berlin, the Director of the Botanical Gardens and the Director of the Botanical Museum. Already having completed more work than most botanists do in a lifetime, Engler, at age 45, had only just begun his work. He was responsible for the creation of a new botanical gardens (still in its original location at Berlin-Dahlem) and for pulling together a staff of specialists who dominated the world's taxonomic research until world War II. By 1909 he and his co-workers had completed "*Die Natürlichen Pflanzenfamilien*" an encyclopedic work comprising the entire plant kingdom.

In 1905 Engler commenced publication of his monograph of the Araceae and in collaboration with his colleague Kurt Krause (See *Aroideana*, Vol. 2(1): 26-27), published 8 volumes before it was completed in 1920, only one year before his retirement at age 77. Despite his official retirement he continued editing and supervising the "*Botanischer Jahrbucher*" (the journal he had founded in 1880) as well as "*Das Pflanzenreich*" (a series of monographs intended for all families) and the second edition of "*Die Natürlichen Pflanzenfamilien*" a system of classification at the family level). Engler continued to work until his death on October 10, 1930.

It would be unfair to leave the impression that Engler's work was chiefly restricted to the Araceae. In

fact, considering the tremendous scope of his endeavors, the family may have been the lesser part of his work. He published 25 families for "Die Natürlichen Pflanzenfamilien" alone and was a leader in the study of plant geography. His system of classification at the family level is still the most

widely used today among the world's major herbaria. Still, no other family held his attention for so long or so intently as the Araceae and we aroid lovers can be thankful that a botanist with such genius as Engler's, saw an aroid and was turned on by what he saw.

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Caladium lindenii formerly *Xanthosoma lindenii*