

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month May 2002 - *Agavaceae Family*

The members of the *Agavaceae* family are: *Agave*, *Beaucarnea*, *Beschorneria*, *Nolina*, *Calibanus*, *Furcraea*, *Polianthes*, *Manfreda*, *Yucca*, *Dasylyrion* and *Hesperaloe*. The *Agave* family, like the *Cactaceae* family, is entirely new world in origin, although many members have been naturalized around the world.



Agave margaritae entered in the 2001 Intercity Show by Petra Crist

All the members of the *Agavaceae* family are easily grown from seed. Although many of members of this family grow very large with age, they are particularly good looking as seedlings, and can be kept small for many years in pots. All described below are easily grown in Southern California. They can remain unprotected in pots or the ground year-round. They thrive with regular feeding with any

general purpose fertilizer. Their appearance is best when they are cleaned regularly, with debris removed from the leaves, and dead leaves removed to prevent insects from making homes. Many offset freely, and these offsets can be removed and repotted, giving a steady supply of small plants. Many growers keep the offsets, and dispose of the the mother plant, keeping size, health and condition under control.



Agave filifera compacta entered in the 2001 Intercity Show by Lem and Pat Higgs

Agaves are native to Southern North America, Mexico, Central America, Northern South America and the West Indies. There are dwarf forms just a few inches across, but most species are larger, stretching to 10 feet or more across.

Some of the smaller growing species include:

Agave colorata, from Sonora and Sinaloa will grow in the ground to 3 feet across, but will stay smaller in pots. This is a beautiful, glaucous to light gray species, with red zones and occasional cross banding. It's rare in habitat, and was known as "mescal ceniza".

San Gabriel Valley Cactus and Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month May 2002 - *Agavaceae Family*

Agave titanota from Sierra Mixteca. Full grown at only 15 inches across, it has spectacular brown teeth and spines.

Agave utahensis and its varieties grow to 10 to 20 inches across. The narrow tooth leaves have long sharp ends. *var. nevadensis* is particularly beautiful when well grown.

Beaucarnia are native to Texas and Mexico. *Beaucarnia recurvata* are often seen for sale under the common name of "Pony Tail Palm. It is easily grown, hardy in Southern California and needing little care. It does well in pots or in the ground, and can become an impressive specimen plant in the garden.

Calibanus is a monotypic genus, consisting of *C. hookeri* from central Mexico.



Calibanus hookeri entered in the 2001 Intercity Show by Jacques DeTisnè

C. hookeri has a hemispherical caudex covered with a gray to dark brown thick bark. The leaves are grass-like, and are produced in tufts. Readily available, and hardy in Southern California, this plant will grow quickly if placed in the ground for a few years. It's worthwhile

growing a few because the caudices vary in shape, pattern and texture.

Dasyilirion is a small genus with about 10 species, all of which get very large. Most look like fountains of very narrow leaves, with small sharp spines. They are very pretty, but are best viewed from a distance.

Hesperaloe is a genus from Mexico and Texas. Most species have long leathery leaves, fibrous at the edges. The flowers resemble Aloe flowers. It is more a landscape plant than a pot plant, and can be found in many gardens in Southern California.

Nolina, native to California Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico is a genus of long leafed shrubs that do well in local gardens.

Yucca species grow throughout the United States and Northern Mexico.

Yucca brevifolia, the Joshua tree is native to the Mojave desert. It blooms in the spring, and requires good drainage, particularly when grown on the coastal side of the mountains.

Yucca filamentosa comes from the Southeastern United States. It grows in clumps, with no visible stem.

References

H. Gentry, **The Agave Family in Sonora**
A. & G. Irish, **Agaves, Yuccas and Related Plants**

Tom Glavich April 2002
Photos by T. Nomer