

KINGMAN IS GROWING! COLUMN

THE INTRIGUING AGAVE

BY **LINDA REDDICK**, KINGMAN AREA MASTER GARDENER

An Agave is a tough, easy-care succulent that can add style to your garden, tolerate less than ideal conditions and grow just about anywhere. Because of their striking form, and general tolerance to cold, heat, sun, drought, and poor or alkaline soils, Agave's are some of the most useful plants for our desert landscape.

Agave's are members of the succulent family and are perennials. They come in all sizes, shapes and colors, from the Americana (Century Plant) who's flower stock will reach from 15' to 40', and can spread 10' in width, to the Agave utahensis which is a clumping Agave only about 1' tall and wide.

As accent plants

Some of these plants can overwhelm a small yard or garden, so check the plant's mature size before planting. Since many have thorns or spines, do not plant them near walkways or play areas, however others are available without those sharp tips.

As a background plant, or to fill a large vacant spot in your landscape try;

1. Agave americana (Century plant) As mentioned, the Century Plant can spread to 10' in width and its flower stock has been known to reach 40', however the average flower stock is only about 20'. This bold, sculptural plant has grayish blue-green leaf blades that reach 3 to 5 feet in length. This Agave is a prolific producer of offset. Leaf blades are well armed with saw-toothed edges and should be placed at least 6 feet away from frequented areas.

2. *Agave Americana* var *marginata* (Variegated Century Plant) The *Marginata* is a smaller variety of the Century plant, with large rosettes 4' to 5' tall and 5' to 8' wide. It has narrow sword like leaf blades, 3' long, which are gray-green with strong cream to yellow stripes down each margin. This *Agave* looks great in a garden as contrast in color and form. It does need moderate water with occasional deep watering. Be careful not to over water during winter months. s
3. *Agave weberi* (Weber's *Agave*) - Is slightly smaller; more refined, and is a deeper blue-green, with soft, almost luminous leaves unlike the *Americana*. With leaves 4' long by 8" wide that are armed only at the tip with a sharp point. This *Agave* is noticeably sensitive to light and closes up when conditions are too hot or too bright, but tolerates cold. It spawns offsets, but needs some supplemental irrigation in very hot summer areas. Space 3 to 6 feet apart for massing.
4. *Agave attenuate* (Fox Tail *Agave*) - Massing, 4' to 5' tall and wide with pale green leaves that emerge from a tight central spear and reach gracefully back to resemble a large open green flower. The flower stalk reaches 5' to 10' and it reflexes back towards the ground before arching upwards again, thus giving it its common name "Fox Tail *Agave*".
5. *Agave vilmoriniana* (Octopus *Agave*) - Is a striking specimen planted in the ground. It seldom reaches over 3 to 4 feet but spreads to 6 feet wide. Blue-grey with sprawling, twisted form and leaf blades more slender than the Century plant. Give moderate water in summer and protect from cold and reflective sun. In addition it makes a good container plant, which would be beneficial as it is cold sensitive.

As Container Plants

Many *Agaves* are suitable for containers so they are easily interspersed through out your landscape. In addition a container may be a good idea for some *Agave*'s because certain varieties are frost sensitive. Here is a list of a few *Agaves* that are suitable for containers;

1. *Agave Americana* var. *medio-picta* "Alba" (Tuxedo *Agave*) - The Tuxedo *agave* is a variety of the Century Plant, which grows 3' to 4' tall and 4' to 6' wide, with bold greenish cream central stripe and blue-green margins.



2. *Agave angustifolia* var. (*Marginata*) - (*Variegated Caribbean Agave*) – Has green leaves with marginal bands of bright white. A tight rosette of stiff sword like blade leaves each up to 3 feet long and 2 inches wide.
3. *Agave* ‘*Blue Glow*’ (*Blue Glow*) - The leaves of this *Agave* are blue green with red margins, which are attractively displayed when back lit. Unlike many agaves it is a solitary rosette which grows 1’ to 2’ high and wide. The *Blue Glow* is a hybrid between *agave attenuate* and *agave ocahui*, but looks nothing like either parent plant.
4. *Agave bovicornuta* p (*Cow Horn Agave*) - A solitary growing *Agave*, open rosettes with wide yellow-green to medium-green leaves that are widest in the middle. Leaf blades are edged with large reddish brown teeth. Growing 2’ to 3’ tall and 3’ to 5’ wide it takes this *Agave* 12 years or more to produce a 16’ to 23’ tall branched flower stalk bearing 2” long yellow and green flowers.
5. *Agave colorata* (*Mescal Ceniza*) – Is a stunning plant when placed in front of a dark green background. This *Agave* grows 4’ tall and wide with blue-grey leaves are short and broad 1’ to 2 ½’ long and 7” wide at the widest point. The flower stalk of the *Colorate* can tower 10’ tall and looks like a small leafless tree.
6. *Agave* ‘*cornelius*’ (*Quasimotto Agave* or *Dwarf Century Plant*) - Only growing 1’ to 2’ tall and 2’ to 4’ wide it forms a small rosette about 18” tall. The short strongly variegated yellow to cream leaves have undulating margins. This is a slower growing variety and suckers to form small colonies.

7. *Agave filifera* – Dark green leaves have white filaments that detach from leaf margins and curl. It is a clumping dense rosette up to 2' wide and 18" tall. A 6' tall spike carrying 2" flower, greenish when young, turning brownish as they age. The name *filifera* means 'carrying threads'.
8. *Agave geminiflora* – (Pincushions Agave) - A short stemmed plant that forms dense symmetrical rosettes of narrow dark green leaves. The leaves have slight red-brown tips. The long thin leaves are about 2' long and 3/8" in diameter. The flower stalk is a narrow spike 15' to 18' tall that develop about 10 years after plant starts growing, Flowers are yellow, but greenish near the base, they are flushed with some red or purple. The *geminiflora* is frost sensitive, so it would need to be protected during winter months.



9. *Agave parryi* var. *truncata*. (Parry's Agave) - A compact rosette agave with broad, short, squared off blue-grey leaves with prominent reddish-brown teeth and terminal spines. It grows 2-3' high and 3-4' wide, an infrequent bloomer but its flower spike rises 10' to 20' bearing orange buds that open yellow.
10. *Agave victoruae regenae* (Queen Victoria) - This is a slow growing small clump forming Agave that is only 1' tall and 1 1/2' wide. Its tight fitting deep green leaves are edged with white along the margins, and end in a small terminal spike. When it flowers, which only happens with considerable age, the flower stake can reach 15' and carries densely packed reddish purple flowers. After blooming, this Agave will die off and will have to be replaced, it does not offset.

11. Agave 'Sharkskin' (Shark Skin Agave) - This structural agave grows 2' to 3' tall, 3' to 4' wide, with evenly spaced thick triangular dark gray-green leaves that have smooth margins and a prominent sturdy terminal spike. Its common name was derived from the plants color and texture.

I could go on and on, as there are over 50 varieties of Agave's. You can easily choose from giant to dwarf, or from plain to exotic, to incorporate in your landscape. Another feature with Agaves is your landscape will take on a different look from year to year as the Agave's mature. Before planting make note of how large the particular variety will grow when it matures, and if it produces offsets or will it die off after flowering. Agaves are interesting, low maintenance, low water, desert landscape plants. They can be over watered, so water sparingly and do not plant them where water collects.

Here is a suggested potting mixture for Cactus and Succulents

2 parts potting soil

1 part sand

HAPPY GARDENING!!

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA MOHAVE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AT 101 E. BEALE STREET, SUITE A, KINGMAN OR TELEPHONE 928-753-3788.

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