Agaves for small spaces
By Laura Murphy

Agaves are one of the best adapted groups of landscape plants for arid gardens. Their stiff sword-shaped leaves and bold rosette pattern of growth make them ideal accent plants. Besides being great landscape plants, they do just as well growing in containers on the patio.

Most people are familiar with Agave americana, the Century Plant, which grows an overpowering 6 feet in height and spread! Much too large for most garden spaces. But there are many small growing agave species just right for growing in containers on the patio and planting in home landscapes with limited space. Some of the best include:

Hauachuca agave (Agave parryi huachucensis) grows two feet high and three feet wide. It’s broad, gray-green leaves are edged with distinctive dark brown spines. Individual plants grow in dense rosette pattern. Another interesting feature of this agave are the patterned outlines of leaf edges left imprinted on the undersides of leaves. These impressions were formed when leaves were tightly pressed against one another in the bud stage. Hauachuca is cold hardy in the low, middle and high desert regions of Southern Arizona.

Holly agave (Agave lophantha) is so-named because of its rich, dark holly-green leaves. Individual plants typically grow 18 inches high and wide, but form numerous pups which expand the ‘colony’ out, sometimes to 6 feet across. Pups can be removed to control the overall size of the grouping. Holly agave is hardy in the low and middle elevations of Southern Arizona.
Queen Victoria agave (Agave victorias-reginae) is a favorite among the small agaves due to its dense, perfectly rounded form and unusual triangular-shaped leaves edged in white.

A slow grower, the Queen Victoria agave reaches 2 feet in diameter over time. It makes an ideal specimen for growing in bowl-shaped ceramic pots. This agave is hardy in the low and middle elevation desert.

Twin-flowered agave (Agave geminiflora) is unique among agaves because of its long, thin leaves. In many ways it resembles a yucca, only in miniature, growing to a height and spread of 2 feet. It’s an easy plant to maintain in a container, because unlike many of the other agaves, geminiflora produces no pups. It’s one of the more cold sensitive agaves and will suffer some leaf damage in the mid-20s.
Octopus agave (Agave vilmoriniana)

at 4 feet tall is a little too big to be in the small agave class, but it’s a striking plant worth consideration for home landscapes. It's arching and twisting dark green leaves appear as the arms of an octopus from which it's given its common name. Unlike other agaves, the Octopus agave has no leaf spines and is safe to use near walks or other high-traffic locations. A profusion of plantlets are produced from the flowering stalk and can be easily rooted to form new plants.

Agaves are succulents that have thick water-storing leaves and roots. Most species need only a few inches of rainfall annually to survive. However, they look and grow better with once-a-month watering, especially during their most active growth cycles in spring and fall.

Although agaves have few problems, they are occasionally attacked by the agave weevil. Infested plants wilt and die suddenly. There is no chemical control for these pests; however, removal of the dead plant as soon as possible will prevent the insects from moving to nearby agaves.

Laura Murphy is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. Information for this article from John Begeman of the University of Arizona. For more information, contact the Lake Havasu City
Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105 or visit us at Home Garden Day from 11 am to 1 pm the first Tuesday of every month at the Library.

CONTACT: VICKI COOMBS
ADMINISTRATIVE ASST
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MOHAVE COUNTY
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
101 E BEALE ST STE A
KINGMAN AZ 86401-5808
928 753-3788/928 753-1665 (FAX)
mohavece@cals.arizona.edu

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, James A. Christenson, Director, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, The University of Arizona.

The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.