



Agave

The Agave family of plants is New World in origin. Varieties grow from Canada clear to the southern-most regions of South America. They grow mostly in dry regions of the Western Hemisphere, but can be found in the Caribbean Islands and throughout Central America for example. Several species are cold tolerant to measured temperatures as low as minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit and probably much lower. They grow at high altitudes in South America as well as the low desert regions throughout the hemisphere.

Generally speaking, Agaves are recognized by their succulent leaves that are usually rigid and grow in a rosette pattern. The leaves will almost always have a defined Terminal Spine at the end that differentiates them from Aloes. Most species have teeth on the edges of the leaves while some don't. They range in size from some of the hybridized species which have leaves no more than 1 inch in length to the truly huge species whose leaves can be more than 8 feet long and weigh 30 to 40 pounds each.

One of the most unusual characteristics of the Agave plants is that they are monocarpic. This means that they have only one plant life cycle, or in other words, they are hatched from seed, grow, bloom only once and then die. This life cycle is almost always more than one year. The early European visitors to the New World were amazed by these plants and their life span of 35 years or more and labeled them Century Plants. In fact the life span varies by species and ranges from less than 10 years on some to more than 35 years. The actual bloom trigger is still being studied, but is obviously affected by amounts of water received in certain years by the mature adult plants.

The Agave is a very prolific mother plant. Most species send out underground runners that produce new plants along their length. In addition they all produce very large bloom stalks that will hold hundreds if not thousands of flowers. Each flower is capable of producing a seedpod that will hold several hundred seeds. So one bloom spike will hold several million seeds. Only a small percentage of the seeds will be viable, but there are so many that survival is usually guaranteed. Some species also produce little baby plants on the bloom stalk. These baby plants are known as Bulbils. There are hundreds of these bulbils on one bloom stalk and as the stalk weakens the plants either fall off or fall to the ground with the stalk and take root.

Agave family plants are favorites at the Prickly Palace. We offer more than 50 varieties of agaves and their close relatives. No succulent landscape should be without a few of these magnificent structural forms in it.