

Desert Agave

Desert agave, Desert Century Plant, Century Plant

Agave deserti, *Agave consociate*, *A. pringlei*,

Family: Acanthaceae /Agavaceae

Basic Description: A medium-sized species. It can be either solitary or form colonies with off-sets. Leaves are very long but with considerable variation in width to length ratio. Can be gray, blue-gray, green, glaucous and frequently has a banded appearance. Margins of leaves usually straight, but teeth can appear. Leaves are very concave. Has a wide variety of forms that cause much confusion in identification.



On-site bloom photo will be added when available.

Bloom & Fruit Description: 8-13 ft inflorescence with 6-15 branches. Bright yellow, tubular flowers appear in clumps after approximately 8-10 years, but exact timeline is unknown. Bloom season is from May to July. Plant dies after bloom and seed set.

Cultural information/Uses/Human Interaction: Roasted and used for food in all of its range. Has a long history as a fiber source. A very popular ornamental.

Distribution/Range/Habitat: Native to U.S.: Arizona and Southern California. It's distributed widely in plains and rocky ranges of Southern California, Southern and Western Arizona. Native to Mexico in Northern Sonora Mexico and the Baja Peninsula. Has one of the most extensive elevation ranges of 300 – 5000 feet. It naturally occurs on dry rocky slopes.

Interesting evolutionary modifications per Allan A. Schoenherr:

Bats are a primary pollinator, but this agave has moved far enough North that the traditional bat pollinators do not occur in that region. These agaves occur west of the San Andreas fault and may have been carried north OR the bats territory has moved further south. Most reproduction happens asexually through clones, because flower design allows bees, moths and hummingbirds to collect nectar while bypassing the anthers which contain the necessary pollen for seed set reproduction. Most *A. deserti* in their northern range are not pollinated and only reproduce through clones.

In a specific part of Los Alamos, in Baja California, pollination is occurring by the Carpenter bee (*Xylocopa californica*). In this location the *A. deserti* has adapted a modification where the anthers grow shorter than in other *A. deserti* locations. Carpenter bees are larger than honeybees and they touch the anthers of these agaves when they collect nectar, thus pollinating these agaves.

Cultural Requirements: Propagation occurs through seed dispersal or by off-sets. In the wild, off-set is more common. Seed propagates easily when cultivated, but is erratic in nature (see notes above). Requires very good drainage and full sun. Cold tolerant to 5°F.

Grow well under a nurse species like Galleta Grass, which offer shade and nitrogen to developing seeds that fall in grass areas.

Wildlife/Plant relationships: Bats are primary pollinator. Animals use it for food and shelter; larval host to **California Giant Skipper (*Agathymus stephensi*)**.

Disease/Pathology/toxins: Susceptible to **agave snout weevil**.

Status: Wild salvaging restricted.

Resources:

Agaves, Yucca and Related Plants, Mary & Gary Irish
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, University of Texas at Austin
US Dept of Agriculture
A Natural History of California, Allan Schoenherr

Onsite Notes: Struggled in 2010 and 2011 with snout weevil.