



Stephen &amp; Kristin Pategas

## in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

### Agave Diversity

Agaves are low water-use plants that are strikingly sculptural and usually adorned with spines. There is a great diversity in this species with a wide range in cold hardiness, sizes, leaf shapes, and colors. In Mexico, the leaves of *Agave tequiliana* are used to make tequila and the fermented sap of other agaves provide the drink pulque.

You may remember that in the May 2015 issue there was an article in this space about two huge century plants (*Agave americana*) in front of our home. In mid-April the bloom stalks were 20 feet in height. They topped out with 38 foot-tall spikes and then as expected, the plants withered and they were removed. The words admirable, noble, and splendid are good descriptors for how they grew to a large size and ended their lives after flowering. That is not a coincidence since the word agave derives from the Greek word agavos which means admirable, noble, or splendid.

In our gardens, we grow about a dozen different agaves either in the ground or in containers. While many are “traditional” in look with thick wide leaves with spines on the end, some are surprisingly different. In our collection there is one with thin round leaves and one with spineless rubbery leaves that looks like a squid. The foliage colors vary and include silvery gray, shades of green, and variegated foliage. The colorful variegated foliage includes shades of white, cream, and red. When the blue-green leaves like those on Blue Glow agave are backlit by the sun, the red margins edged with yellow do indeed glow.

Agaves require full to mostly-full sun and well-drained soil. When planting in a container, make sure a well-draining soil mix (perlite is a good additive) is used. If planting in the ground, confirm the area does not hold water for more than about thirty minutes after a rainfall. Meanwhile, creating a planting mound will aid in drainage. Some are more susceptible to wet weather during the winter. Make sure they receive minimal irrigation or none at all once they are established.

Select the right spiny agave to plant under a window and you can pretty much guarantee no one - whether burglar or daughter's boyfriend, will try to enter there. If planted in an area where spines are a concern, snip the sharp tips off with pruners.

These agaves grow successfully at Hortus Oasis:  
*Agave americana* - century plant

*A. (americana x scabra)* 'Gainesville Blue' - Gainesville Blue agave

*A. angustifolia* 'Marginata' - Caribbean agave

*A. (attenuata x ocahui)* 'Blue Glow' - blue glow agave

*A. bracteosa* - squid agave

*A. geminiflora* - twin flower Gemini agave

*A. lopantha* 'Splendida' - Splendida agave

*A. potatorum* - butterfly agave

*A. salmiana* var. *ferox* 'Green Goblet' - Green Goblet agave

*A. victoria-reginae* - Queen Victoria agave



Above: Squid agave is free of spines.

At right: Queen Victoria agave.



At right: Twin flowered agave.



Above: Century plant blooms at full height at Hortus Oasis.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis