



in the garden

by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

# Touch-a, Touch-a, Touch Me Plants

To add visual interest into the gardens we design we always incorporate plants with arresting visual characteristics. Sometimes they are so stimulating they demand to be touched. Since our sense of touch is an important way we relate to our surroundings, touching plants is a great way to develop a more intimate relationship with the garden.

Some plants just beg to be stroked, whether it's the texture or to see if it is real.

Squid agave – *Agave bracteosa*  
(yes, it does look like one)

Torch or candelabra aloe – *Aloe arborescens*  
(red and torch-like)

Balloon flower – *Platycodon grandiflorus*  
(blossoms are puffed up before they open)

Cylinder sansevieria – *Sansevieria cylindrica*  
(cylinder-like leaves)

Lobster-claw heliconia – *Heliconia rostrata*  
(this waxy claw of a bloom is safe to shake)

Lifesaver cactus – *Huernia confusa*  
(amazing look-alike to the candy, but not edible)

Horsetail – *Equisetum hyemale*  
(segmented multiple stems grow upright, keep it contained)

Black bat plant – *Tacca chantrieri*  
(bat-shaped black flower)

Cat's whiskers – *Orthosiphon stamineus*  
(aptly named for the blossoms)

Mexican feather grass – *Nassella*/(*Stipa*) *tenuissima* (finest foliage and blossom texture)

Cardboard plant – *Zamia maritima*  
(thick leathery leaves)

ZZ plant – *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*  
(super glossy leaves that do not look real)

Sapphire Skies yucca – *Yucca rostrata*  
'Sapphire Skies' (bluish, flexible leaves that aren't sharp)

At right: Devil's backbone should be planted next to a chiropractor's front door.

There are those plants that reward you with a sensuous feeling.

Lamb's ear – *Stachys byzantina*  
(It has super-soft foliage but doesn't last long in our climate. Plant it as an annual.)

Devil's backbone – *Pedilanthus tithymaloides*  
(zig zag stems)

Rabbit's foot fern – *Davallia denticulata*  
(exposed roots are furry)

Cow's tongue/flapjack plant/paddle plant – *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora*  
(round flat leaves)

Mexican feather grass – *Nassella* (*Stipa*) *tenuissima*  
(feathery leaves and silky blooms)

Foxtail fern – *Asparagus densiflorus 'Meyerii'*  
(very fuzzy and tail-like)

Top right: Stroke these fine feathery blooms on Mexican feather grass.

Bottom right: Bunny ears cactus has very fine spines that are not for touching.



At right: Lifesaver plant blossoms are not edible!



There are other plants that provide a sharp rebuke. Why do we reach out to touch something that appears sharp? Perhaps we are drawn to danger. Anyway, use a light touch on these unless it says otherwise.

Alligator plant – *Acanthus montanus*  
(very spiny variegated leaves)

Gemini agave – *Agave geminiflora*  
(a globe of sharp-ended spaghetti-like leaves)

Queen Victoria agave – *Agave victoria-reginae*  
(super cool variegation with spiny leaf ends)

Bunny ears cactus – *Opuntia microdasys*  
(They look oh so furry but definitely don't touch. If you do, use duct tape to remove the spines.)

Screw pine – *Pandanus utilis*  
(leaves with saw-toothed margins spiral up the trunk)

Needle palm – *Rhapidophyllum hystrix*  
(serious needles adorn the base)

Saw palmetto – *Serenoa repens*  
(small saw-like teeth on the stems)

Winged elm – *Ulmus alata*  
(winged corky protrusions on the branches of this tree)

Spanish bayonet – *Yucca aloifolia*  
(very sharp pointed leaves)

Consider adding some of these plants to make your garden more sensual and engaging. Just use caution and common sense when selecting and placing the spiny or thorny ones in locations within the garden.

Hortus Oasis (FL26000315) in Winter Park is a boutique garden design company specializing in residential, commercial and specialty gardens. Stephen is a registered landscape architect and Kristin is a certified landscape designer. Contact them at 407-622-4886/garden@hortus oasis.com

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