

Care of Agaves

Agaves are succulents that store water and nutrients in their leaves. They have fibrous, shallow roots. Although well adapted to desert climates, they require supplemental water and some shade, especially when the plants are small. Some species are also susceptible to frost.

Agaves in the landscape provide unique design aspects, differing in leaf texture and color as well as having an interesting rosette shape. Different species of agaves offer a wide range of sizes. Their varieties of color add highlights and contrast to any landscape and thus they are excellent accent plants. They enhance native and semi-tropical gardens and can be used in formal or natural designs. Larger species create focal points and many can be showcased specimen plants. Smaller sizes can be used effectively as container plants.



SOIL: Agaves like a well-drained soil. A mixture of equal parts potting soil, native soil, and pumice should be used for container planting. When transplanting agaves from pots to the ground, care should be used to not disturb the roots. Typically, no soil amendment is necessary. Place the plants in the ground so that the soil line is the same as the original soil line in the container. It is very important that the plant not be planted deeper than its previous level.

WATER: When planted in the ground, agaves can be placed on a drip line that will deliver 1 gallon of water per hour. In the summer months or when temperatures are above 100 degrees, agaves benefit with 2 to 4 hours of drip irrigation once a week (depending on plant size and soil type). During the winter months irrigation should be reduced to once per month. After winter or monsoon rains watering should be adjusted accordingly.

LIGHT: Agaves that are small in size or are young plants do better with filtered sun. Most mature specimens can tolerate and thrive in full sun provided they have the supplemental water mentioned above.

FERTILIZATION: Agaves have two growing seasons: spring and fall. A complete, balanced fertilizer can be applied monthly during those seasons. A foliar, systemic 20-20-20 fertilizer would be beneficial to the growth of healthy plants.

PESTS AND DISEASES:

Snout weevil (*Scyphophorus acupunctatus*): Agaves and yuccas are prone to infestation of agave snout weevil. This beetle lays her eggs between the leaves of the plant. The eggs cycle into the grub stage that eats the plant tissue. When the plant tissue is exposed it becomes susceptible to bacteria. The bacteria eventually will destroy the plant. You can treat the weevil with an insecticide for both the beetle and the grub. If you have an agave or yucca that has died from the bacteria treat all surrounding agaves or yuccas in the area with the same insecticide.

Crown rot: A fungus (*Phytophthora sp.*) causes crown rot in agaves. *Phytophthora* is dormant in the soil until excess water and humidity occurs. The fungus attacks the crown or the growing point of the plant and destroys the plant. You will notice this condition in the summer months. Preventative fungicide treatments can be made prior to the summer months.

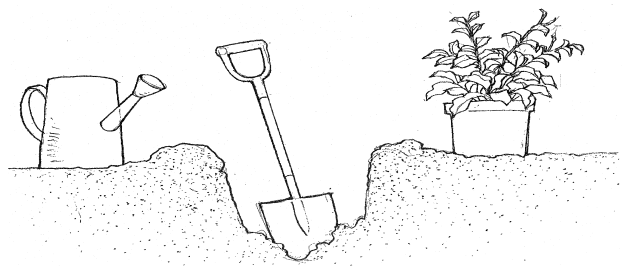
Mites: Eryophid mites are microscopic mites that attack agaves. They cause damage to the plant tissue, deforming both new and old leaves, eventually killing the plant. Treatment is in the form of a contact or systemic miticide.

Rabbits: Some agaves are prone to rabbit damage. Precautions should be taken to protect them from chewing by placing metal cages around the plants.

Need Help?

For more information about particular desert plants or problems, call the Desert Botanical Garden's Plant Hotline, 480-941-1225, Monday through Friday, from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

The Desert Botanical Garden provides a range of services to homeowners including a desert Plant Hotline, a variety of classes about landscaping and gardening in the desert, an onsite library, and an extensive selection of resources in the Garden Shop.



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