

RealEstate

GREEN HOUSE Maj Gen C.S. Bewli An exuberant array

Agaves, the natives of Mexico are perhaps the most familiar of all succulents. These stem succulents are regarded as rosette perennials. Most of the species are generally slow-growing plants that grow well in porous compost.

These flower once in their lifetime — on reaching maturity — and generally die afterwards. These hardy and easy-to-grow succulent plants offer a wide selection of shapes, sizes and forms. The long leathery and fleshy leaves with terminal spines have great longevity and give an ornamental look. These take 8 to 20 years to reach maturity and vary from dwarf species of 10-12 cm in diameter to huge plants of almost three metres in diameter.

The bigger varieties such as *Agave americana*, make striking landscape plants that look majestic in large spaces. The smaller species such as *agave filifera*, *parviflora*, *titanota*, *stricta 'nana'* and *victoria reginae* are excellent pot plants for green houses and mini gardens. The medium-sized plants such as *agave parryi*, *attenuata* and *bovicornuta* that form outstanding rosettes are suitable for landscaping as well as planting in containers. These plants form an important element in each garden as they remain beautiful throughout the year. Because of their conspicuous and unique look, they are much sought after. Propagation is done from seeds, vegetative offsets or through stolons. For good growth, these plants should be fed with nitrogen fertiliser once in spring.

Agave parviflora

Plant facts: This is a low-growing and stemless dwarf species, whose single head hardly exceeds 6 inches in height. It is a compact thick leaved rosette forming perennial with rigid and pointed dark green leaves having beautiful white markings. Smooth leaf margins have conspicuous white curling fibres along the edges.

Growing grace: It does well in our climate and can tolerate hot sun in summer and extreme cold in winter. To get a compact rosette, it should be grown in a sunny and airy location. Propagation is through seeds as well as through offsets which come on mature 7-8 year old plants. Flower spike is 3-6 ft long with cream-coloured flowers, and appears only on a mature plant. It should be grown in porous soil mix. It should be watered freely during summer but in winter's water only when the top soil gets dry. The plant grows well even without fertilisation, however, it should be fertilised once in spring with nitrogen fertiliser.

Agave stricta 'nana'

Plant facts: Agave stricta 'nana' is a dwarf and slow-growing striking symmetrical rosette of many yellowish green narrow, pointed, needle-like leaves. The plant gives look of a spiny ball of compact leaves with terminal spines. The leaves reach upto a length of 25 cm when grown in pot and love exposure to full sun.

Growing grace: For the rosette to remain compact and beautiful the plant should be grown in porous soil mix and a tight watering schedule should be followed by allowing the compost to dry between two waterings in summer. In winter, the requirement of watering is reduced. Flower spike, which appears on a mature plant, is about 1.2- metre tall with maroonish flowers. Because of its small size, it is an excellent plant for containers and for landscaping mini gardens. These plants add a distinct flavour to the garden due to their yellowish-green colour. Propagation is from seeds or offsets.

Health metre

- Remove the dead and diseased leaves periodically.
- Grow in a sunny and airy location.
- Grow in wider pots. As the plant grows bigger the pot size should be changed accordingly.
- Take care of the terminal spines from hail and other external damage as they don't regenerate.
- Remove offsets for overall beauty of the plant, these can be grown separately.
- Don't over water for the crown to remain compact, allow the plants to dry before watering.
- To get healthy leaves, nitrogen manure should be added once in growing season.