

Plant Cultivation Notes

Growing Hardy Yucca and related plants

This is a guide to growing hardy Yucca in colder climates based on my experience of years of trial and error and of course success. Following some basic rules will hopefully bring you success with these fabulous plants. (Agave are not covered in these notes, I have a separate set of notes for them).

Yucca, Dasylirion and Hesperaloe all have relatively hardy species within their genus and these plants can bring a touch of the desert or arid exotica to any garden.

Choosing the right species is vitally important, so here is my list of the best.

Plant selection.

Yucca rostrata. Trunk forming species with a rosette of narrow glaucous leaves. Growing to 3 meters + White, bell shaped flowers are produced on 1 meter tall stems. Probably the hardiest of all Yucca.

Yucca gloriosa. Trunk forming, with stiff broad leaves in dark olive green. Flowers, like all yucca with bell shaped white to cream flowers on 1 meter tall stems. Grows to 2 meters tall with a spread of 2 to 3 meters. Very hardy . A variegated form is available, but this is less hardy.

Yucca linearifolia/ linearis. Similar to Y. rostrata but with very narrow almost needle like leaves, altogether a more refined and dainty species. Forms a trunk and sends out suckers from the base. As hardy as Y. rostrata and more tolerant of damp conditions. Rare and hard to find.



Yucca rostrata

Yucca aloifolia. Known as 'Spanish Dagger' because of the very stiff, dark green leaves, armed with deadly sharp tips. Again this is a trunk forming and suckering plant. Flowers freely like *Y. gloriosa*.

Yucca treculeana. Solitary trunk forming yucca growing to 2 meters. Leaves are stiff and glaucous green in colour. A relatively new species for cold climate culture. Should prove to be hardy to -14c once established.

Yucca faxoniana. The big beast! Broad, stiff, mid green leaves, form a chunky trunk. Does sucker and can branch when mature. Should be hardy to RHS rating H4/H5

Yucca baccata. Also known as the 'Banana Yucca' because the flowers vaguely resemble bananas. This is a broad leaved Yucca which is quite slow to form a short stubby trunk. Hardy to -15 and lower.

Dasyilirion wheeleri forms a tight rosette of narrow glaucous leaves that are armed with sharp teeth down the leaf margins. Grows to form a ball 1.2 meters wide and tall. Hardy to -15C.

Dasyilirion miquihuanensis. The very attractive Dasyilirion, producing a rigid rosettes of countless, stiff, green leaves with small marginal teeth and tufts of pale fibers on the tips. Older plants form a trunk up to 2m tall. Hardy to -12C

Hesperaloe parviflora (Texas Red Yucca). A very showy succulent from southern Texas and northeastern Mexico, with yearly flowering of stems of red bell shaped flowers. Rare in UK gardens, but not a new plant to cultivation. What is new about this beautiful plant has been the realisation of its tolerance to sub-zero winter temperatures! Can survive -20C. But I think that anything below -5C would require dryish, well drained soil.

Hesperoyucca whipplei. One of the few monocarpic plants in the Yucca group. This is a stunning plant with a tight rosette of stiff glaucous leaves, forming a low small mound. The flower stem is particularly impressive. Rising to 6 meters, with the stem starting red and the flowers opening in white. Hardy to -15C, but again it needs a dryish soil over winter.

Thats my top selection of plants I group as Yucca and their relatives.



Cultivation.

The first and most important factor for success is choosing the right site for planting. It's not a surprise that Yucca need full sun and a well drained soil. Drainage can be improved naturally by using slopes or raised ground. Building raised beds is a good option, but remember to provide plenty of drainage holes in the walls of any raised bed. Good air movement is also a factor as is the ability to protect your desert plants from very cold winter winds.



The second factor is soil conditions. Yucca need a very free draining growing medium. This is not to say that they don't like a good soak in summer, It is just that they can not tolerate wetness around the roots at any time. Where ever you plant, on a slope or in a raised bed, it is vital that masses of drainage material is added to the planting hole and back fill. Dig a hole for your plant that is at least twice as deep and wide as the pot it is currently in. Back fill the bottom third of the hole with old brick or stone rubble (avoid lumps of concrete) and then pour 10mm shingle over the rubble. Mix the back fill soil with 50% drainage. The drainage material can be horticultural grit, pumice or similar. I use expanded clay pellets, sometimes called Hydrolecca, as it is light weight and totally PH neutral. It is also good practice to position your yucca high in the planting hole and then mound the substrate mix around the plant, thus improving drainage still further. I tend not to add a fertiliser or organic material to the soil at the planting stage, as Yucca prefer poor soils. If a tall specimen plant is being introduced to the garden, it is advisable to add some support until the plant's roots have taken hold.

Water and fertiliser are not major issues for most Yucca. I give all my Yucca a liquid feed with a low nitrogen fertiliser with added trace elements (NPK: 12.5-25-25) in April and May. No further fertiliser is given. Extra water is provided in the hottest months, but then nearly always in the mornings and only maybe once a week.

Winters in wet, cold climates are the biggest challenge for most arid loving plants and while Yucca are more tolerant of wet winters, they don't like cold wet conditions. The way to lessen the effects of winter wet is to ensure that proper drainage is provided, so getting the planting right is essential.

I use horticultural fleece to protect my Yuccas if there is very cold wintery weather forecast, but always remember to remove any covering as soon as the danger of cold damage has past.

If you need specific information not covered in these notes please email us at:
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