Some agave plants grow well in our area



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uestion: In recent travels to the southwest I came across an interesting plant called agave. I would like to know more about this plant and if it will grow in our area.

Answer: The interesting, eye-catching agave plant is native to the southern United States, Mexico, the Caribbean and northern South America. It is valued for its very striking appearance, how easy it is to grow and for being drought tolerant.

Although it looks very much like a cactus, it is actually a perennial succulent. Agave is in the Agavacea family of evergreen succulents, which also includes dracaenas, yuccas and ponytail palms. Commonly named the 'Century Plant' because it was thought they need about a century to bloom, however, many will bloom after 10 to 15 years. And although they are often found in the gardens in drier Mediterranean climates, there are varieties that will grow nicely in the Pacific Northwest

Agave is a genus of several hundred species, so there should be one to meet the needs of any garden – from very large specimens that grow to 20 feet in diameter, to rather small dish-sized varieties perfect for small pots.

Some have stiff, upright leaves with sharp spines along the edges and others are soft with no spines, but most all have leaves that end in a sharp point. They come in colors ranging from green, blue-green to gray-green, some are variegated with yellow or white striped leaves, and others have leaves with eye-catching red or white tips.

Agave plants are typically long-lived plants grown mainly for their



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is a great option. They

prefer rocky or sandy

soil but will tolerate any

well-draining soil, and

they are not particular

about the soil pH. Aga-

ve plants need a sunny

location and depend-

ing on the full size at

space to spread out. Be-

fore planting, confirm

the location you have

chosen will be appro-

priate for the plant at

full size, as many reach

4 to 6 or even 10 feet in

When first establish-

ing plants they will need

water every 4-5 days for

taper off to once a week,

depending on the weath-

er. Once established, let

the soil dry out before

watering. If you do not

plant, there are smaller

varieties that do well in

pots and can be planted

in the standard cactus

potting mix. Consider

using an unglazed pot,

as it will allow better

have the space for a large

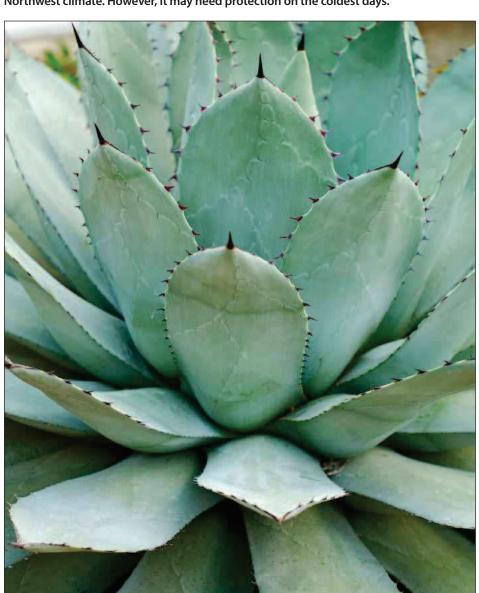
then every other week

about a month. Then

diameter.

maturity, they need

Agave victoriae-reginea (Queen Victoria Century Plant) is a smaller variety of agave plant that is well-suited to a Pacific Northwest climate. However, it may need protection on the coldest days.



Agave parryi's (Artichoke Agave) silvery-blue to silvery-green leaves have dark spines. The variety is a good choice to grow in the Pacific Northwest.

dramatic foliage, not their flowers. Agave is monocarpic, meaning they bloom one time when fully mature, which can take anywhere from 5 to 40 years, and then die. The blooms are quite spectacular, as the giant flowering spike can reach upwards of 15 feet or more. Generally, by the time they bloom, they will have produced small pup plants around the base or will have produced seeds or plantlets on the flower stalk, which can then be transplanted to replace the parent plant once it

Agave plants are fairly easy to grow; they seem to thrive on neglect. For those looking for drought-resistant, fire-resistant, low-water plants, agave evaporation of excess moisture. For agave plants sensitive to cold, planting in pots offers the flexibility of bringing them indoors during the winter months. As with many plants, fall and spring are good times for planting agave.

Although most prefer drier Mediterranean climates, there are quite a few that are cold hardy and will grow in the Pacific Northwest. Here is just a sampling:

- Agave havardiana (Harvard Agave), silver-gray leaves
- Agave Montana (Mountain Agave), apple-green leaves with red teeth
- Agave ovatifolia (Whale's Tongue Agave), gray to powdery blue leaves lined with small teeth
- Agave parryi (Artichoke Agave), silvery-blue to silvery-green leaves with dark spines
- Agave victoriae-reginae (Queen Victoria Century Plant), dark green leaves with white margins and one of the smaller varieties; may need protection on the coldest days

When considering an agave plant, chose one that will make a nice focal point in the garden, paying attention to the size it will achieve at maturity. Also, remember most have sharp thorns or prickly edges, which is something to keep in mind if there are children or pets in the home; placing them away from walkways and patio areas is helpful.

Do you have a gardening question? Email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@ oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.