

Agave angustifolia: Century Plant, Variegated Caribbean Agave¹

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Introduction

Variegated Caribbean agave is not common in cultivation, having green leaves with marginal bands of bright white. The leaves are borne from a very short trunk. Its tight rosette of stiff, sword-shaped leaves, each up to 3 feet long and 2 inches wide, makes a dramatic statement in the landscape and is much favored for use in rock gardens. The sharp spine at the tip of its toothed leaves is often removed to protect people and pets. Locate it at least 6 feet away from walks and other areas where people could contact the spiny foliage.



Figure 1. Full form—*Agave angustifolia*: century plant, variegated Caribbean agave.
Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf—*Agave angustifolia*: century plant, variegated Caribbean agave.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Agave angustifolia*

Pronunciation: uh-GAW-vee an-gus-tif-FOLE-ee-uh

Common name(s): century plant, variegated caribbean agave

Family: *agaveceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to North America, Mexico, and South America

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Invasive potential: invasive and not recommended by UF/IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)

Uses: border; accent; mass planting

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 3 to 4 feet

Spread: 3 to 4 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: spiny

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches

Leaf color: blue or blue-green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; usually with one stem/trunk

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: unknown

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Caribbean agave is a hardy survivor, tolerating heat, drought, and salty seaside conditions. Little if any irrigation is needed to maintain the plant once established. It grows best in full sun but can adapt to some shade. After 10 years or more (though not a century), a lofty flower spike is produced, with terminal panicles of pale yellow to white blooms. The plant can be used in residences as a free-standing specimen and is usually not planted in mass due to its unusual color and form. Due to its large size and striking habit and color, most residences only need one of these. Larger commercial landscapes have room for multiple mass plantings which can create a dramatic impact.

Propagation is by detaching the well-rooted suckers appearing at the base.

Design Considerations

The architectural form, coarse texture, and dramatic color of the variegated Caribbean agave make it perfect as a specimen plant in highly visible spaces in the landscape. Use with companion plants that are softer, with small foliage and mounding or spreading forms to contrast and highlight the tight rosette of the leaves. Pairing with plants that have more texture and small foliage will also contrast with the large, smooth, stiff leaves. To highlight the white margins in the leaves use dark green foliage or plants with small to medium flowers with cool bright colors, such as

purples, blues, and corals. Another option is to build on the white theme with plants that have white flowers. Large flowers with a mass of soft petals will create more interest with contrast. Large masses of low-growing companion plants around the base or in front of the agave will create a nice setting to show off the form.

Pests and Diseases

None of major concern.