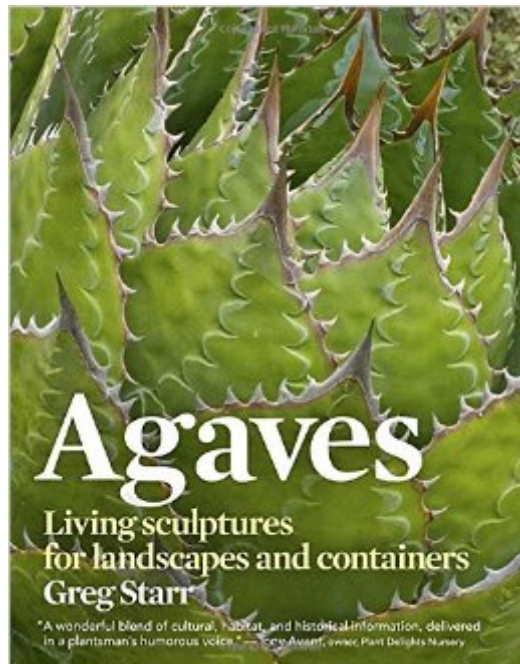


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# Agaves: Living Sculptures For Landscapes And Containers



## Synopsis

Gardeners and garden designers are having a love affair with agaves. It's easy to see why—they're low maintenance, drought-tolerant, and strikingly sculptural, with an astounding range of form and color. Many species are strikingly variegated, and some have contrasting ornamental spines on the edges of their leaves. Fabulous for container gardening or in-the-ground culture, they combine versatility with easy growability. In *Agaves*, plant expert Greg Starr profiles 75 species, with additional cultivars and hybrids, best suited to gardens and landscapes. Each plant entry includes a detailed description of the plant, along with its cultural requirements, including hardiness, sun exposure, water needs, soil requirements, and methods of propagation. Agaves can change dramatically as they age and this comprehensive guide includes photos showing each species from youth to maturity—a valuable feature unique to this book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This long awaited tome fills a critical void in the literature on Agaves. The long out-of-print *Agaves of Continental North America* from 1982 is still the best reference for species identification, however if one wants cultural information, including the new cultivars (hybrids), then you need this book. Greg has taken his intimate knowledge of all things Agave and translated it to the written word in a highly readable fashion. The photographs are exceptionally well done and the choice of images for this book is worthy of praise. There is a bit of wit and wisdom that interplay throughout the text and this I find uplifting especially compared to some of the more recent generalist works that are as dry as the

habitats the plant live in. So some so much that I would need my own xeric adaptation to continue reading them. This book will be great for the Agavologist, as Greg call the people whom study agaves, for the new and old collector, the botanical curious and the diehard agave enthusiast. It isn't often that one gets really excited about a new plant book and I admit that I haven't had those emotions evoked in quite a while.... until now. I spent nearly 3 hours pouring through the pages, reading the information and learning the history and culture of some of the more obscure agaves. This is a Must Have for anyone whom grows Agaves. The author has done a tremendous job in writing and Timber Press, as always, has put a very worthwhile book out! Kudos to both.

I highly recommend this book for anyone with an interest in the Genus Agave. Although the cultural information is geared for the US, the book contains enough information for others to adopt for their climates. The illustrations are fantastic. Dozens of species have been photographed in habitat and presented in colour and there is an ID key at the end of the book for similar species.

The information and photographs are so useful I wish it covered all Agave species. The species and cultivars in this book are limited to cold-hardy, recently discovered, and under-appreciated species, plus innovative cultivars. One extremely valuable feature is the suggestions for companion plantings that will thrive in the same conditions. Mr. Starr was a garden designer and grower of all sorts of xeric plants prior to specializing in Agaves, so his suggestions can be relied on. Another valuable point of the book are the photos of plants in their native locations, which gives understanding as to what conditions the plant really needs to be successful. And the photos are gorgeous. It exceeded my expectations. A good companion to the Gentry book.

This book tries to appeal to several audiences. The first audience is the people of the horticultural world who would love the stories behind the plants and the locations where they were originally found. The other audience is the novice or intermediate agave gardener. It's tough to pull off such a multi-audience book, but I think the author succeeds because of his down to earth writing style, sense of humor, and organization. Most people who are interested in agaves will really like this book by such person who was historically key to bringing agaves to our attention.

On balance, an excellent and up-to-date read on many of the Agave you will find in the Southwest, graciously filled with tons of high quality, color pictures. The writing is crisp, witty and thorough, with consistency from one species to another and after a few entries, you know exactly what to expect of

the just about any other section. Another great thing that this book has is a detailed section on how to distinguish between look-a-likes, including visuals and tabulations of the key differences. This is extremely helpful, especially with less mature specimens. Overall, there is very little fluff here and almost all the nitty-gritty substance that any enthusiast, hobbyist or simply interested reader will want. That said, as is often the case, there is no perfect love. Case in point, you will find more than a few species left out here. Some, like *A. gypsophila*, are admittedly oddball, but to exclude *A. americana* and the several very well known and beautiful variegated forms? That just seems... odd. Additionally, while it covers *A. bovicornuta* in detail, no mention of the 'dwarf' form, *A. cupreata*. Another one I missed was *A. franzosinii*, which I would have loved to get more insight on (and certainly to see some pictures of mature specimens). When there are forms common enough to be picked up at nurseries in many parts of Arizona almost year round, it is surprising (and a little disappointing) that they're not covered in a text written by a native. Indeed, some of these are not even mentioned in the index or in passing anywhere. If there's an explanation for these gaps to be found in the text, I have not come across it. Likewise, a slight disappointment in the section on *A. salmiana*, which seems all too brief and without enough coverage of the different forms and varieties. There also seems to be some confusion as it talks about *A. salmiana* var *ferox*, but no photos. Also mentions that variety as being the most commonly cultivated, which is strange because it is the single most un-common in cultivation in the US. A bit more depth on this species, especially some contrasting photos of the varieties, would have been a welcome addition. All that said, I still can't deduct more than one star, since it is a phenomenal work and exceptionally well done. For species that are covered, it is probably the single best reference out there right now, and easily the best in terms of photography and practical advice. Bottom line, if the Agave you seek knowledge about are covered in this book, you will not be disappointed by what you find. If they're not in the book, at the very least, you will learn a ton about the plants in general and some other species you may have never heard of. A good read either way.

Greg Star's passion for agaves comes through in his writing and photography. This is more than a compendium of the genus Agave, it is a highly entertaining read. Greg's field notes in particular lend a plant hunter's insight to the habitat of each species. His humor is delightful and unexpected. This book is more than a list of plants, it's a must-have for the succulent collector and for anyone intrigued by the agaves of the desert Southwest and Mexico.

This is an excellent for those in desert climates, since the author lives in Tucson, Arizona and gives

growing requirements that match those conditions. He discusses a number of agaves which would add interest to the backyard landscape

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