

# Did You Know?

---



## Agave, *Agave* spp.

- The genus *Agave* has more than 200 species. They are indigenous to Central America to northern Mexico, and some tropical areas of South America. They also grow in arid regions of the United States, up to USDA hardiness zone 6. *Agave americana* is a 2024 HSA Notatable Native plant.
- Considered succulents, agave plant leaves grow in a rosette formation and the plant flowers after 10-30 years of growth (depending on the species). Following flowering, the primary rosette dies, leaving “pups” surrounding the base of the parent plant to continue to live.
- The flowers of various species support a diverse group of pollinators including nectivorous bats, hummingbirds, perching birds, moths, and bees.
- Agave species have many uses over the centuries, including the sharp spine at the end of the leaf of some species was removed with fiber from the leaf and used as a needle and thread. The leaf fiber has also been used to create items like ropes, mats, sandals, and brushes.
- The stem, base or heart of the agave plant called the pina is in the center where the leaves attach, and is carbohydrate rich. This part of the plant is roasted and used to create alcohols like tequila and mezcal, agave syrup, or ground into edible patties. Pulque is another beverage made from the lightly fermented sap of the agave.
- Tequila is made only from *Agave tequiliana*, also known as the blue Weber agave (agave azul). Mexico has regulated tequila production, limiting it to only the Mexican states: Jalisco, Nayarit, Guanajuato, Michoacan, and Tamaulipas.
- Mezcal is another liquor made in Mexico but it is created from over 25 different agave species. It is made primarily in Oaxaca.
- Tequila is made from steam baking the piña in an oven prior to processing and aging an average of 5-7 years. Mezcal is baked in an earthen pit lined with lava rocks and fueled with wood and charcoal, which provides a smokier flavor prior to processing. Mezcal is aged 8-30 years on average.
- Agave is cultivated in orchards called potreros. Historically, pinas were harvested at a certain size. Today, the harvest occurs when the sugar content is at least 24%.

# Did You Know?

---



- Agave syrup is sweeter than sugar made from sugar cane. Use about 25% less agave syrup than white sugar in recipes.
- Agave syrup has a low glycemic index of 17, making it a desirable sweetener for managing blood sugar levels.

*It is the policy of The Herb Society of America, Inc. not to advise or recommend herbs for medicinal or health use. This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be considered as a recommendation or endorsement of any particular medical or health treatment. Please consult a health care provider before pursuing any herbal treatments.*