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Agaves, Yucca, And Their Kin: Seven Genera Of The Southwest (Grover E. Murray Studies In The American Southwest)



Synopsis

Until now, there has not been a single, full-color guide to some of the most recognizable genera of the southwestern United States: Agave, Dasylirion, Hechtia, Hesperaloe, Hesperoyucca, Nolina, and Yucca (the century plants, sotols, false agaves, chaparral yuccas, beargrasses, and yuccas). Some of the species treated in this guide have previously appeared scattered throughout a dozen other field guides, often split roughly between wildflowers and woody plants, or they have been confined to studies of small geographic regions. Still others have appeared virtually nowhere other than in the Flora of North America or in various state floras.

Intended for the layperson, *Agaves, Yuccas, and Their Kin* covers all currently recognized taxa of these seven genera, in alphabetical order, ranging from Texas to the Pacific. Geographically, this guide covers all of the southwestern United States, encompassing southern California, southern Nevada, all of Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, plus western Texas, from Brownsville north through the Panhandle into Colorado, including the Edwards Plateau. It includes forms that may have been discounted at some time by various authors, as well as recently published or as yet unpublished taxa not previously presented in any other book. Complete with almost four hundred color photographs of species in various life cycle stages, *Agaves, Yuccas, and Their Kin* is a comprehensive, accessible, and much needed field guide for xerophile enthusiasts all across the Southwest.

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Customer Reviews

Although I am a professional plant taxonomist, I have always been frustrated on my trips to the western United States because I could never identify satisfactorily the agaves, yuccas, and similar-looking plants that I found in the wild. Now, with *Agaves, Yuccas, and Their Kin*, Jon Hawker has solved that problem and done the impossible in creating an easy-to-use identification guide to these enigmatic plants.

—Bob Mohlenbrock, distinguished professor emeritus, Southern Illinois University

Jon Hawker masterfully explains the taxonomy and nomenclature of all the plants he covers and expertly leads the reader through the intricacies and nuances of the oft-times confusing world of plant names. The photographs of all taxa give the reader a feel for the differences between species and what to expect when looking for these plants in habitat. The straightforward, logical approach keeps the reader focused.

—Greg Starr, Starr Nursery, Tucson, Arizona

Interested in all aspects of natural history, Jon L. Hawker taught biology, botany, zoology, animal behavior, and ecology at St. Louis Community College for thirty-six years. He lives in Arizona.

Wonderful book. After a very wet winter in the Verde Valley the Agaves and Yuccas are in full growth and were in full bloom this late spring. So the book was great to use while walking and admiring the blooms.

I love this book. The author relates very comprehensive information about these plants in a chatty and readable way. I bet he was a great teacher. Rather than make laborious measurements of plants and plant parts, he provides pictures of his dog next to plants. It works for me. He has been interested in these plants forever, and has vast experience studying them. I have great confidence in his assessments.

Best book yet written on agaves, yuccas, nolinias, dasylirions and hesperaloes. The author has done much, much more than a literature review; he has actually visited most of the plants in habitat and his insights on habitat will be invaluable to the hobbyist and professional grower. Most of the plants discussed are hardy outside in the Denver metro area and certainly throughout Zones 5-7 in the southwestern U. S. and similar climate regions around the world.

This book is a bit of a conundrum for me. On the one hand, you have a wealth of information on a

healthy portion of the species within each genera, and certainly some that are not given treatment elsewhere. For example, you'll find mention of the *A. americana* and its ilk in this tome, but not in Greg Starr's agave book. So that's a plus, and is most definitely welcome incremental coverage compared to other texts. The book is also a good size, fit for use as, say, a field guide. On the downside, the organization of the book is, to put it mildly, maddening. First and foremost, the reliance on trade names or common names for many of the plants, rather than their scientific, species name. Why, I ask you, why in God's name would anyone do that? I don't even know the vast majority of the common names, and I suspect many casual readers would not either. It makes it incredibly difficult to thumb through and find something if you happen to know the proper species name, and you're often better off using the index. The damning thing about this is that, for a purported identification guide, how is that supposed to work? If I can't identify it based on common name, I don't know where to look. If I can't identify it by species name, the index is useless. So... where does that leave the reader? Right in the middle of BFE, that's where. Additionally, and perhaps even more annoying, is that the photos are, firstly, too small or taken too far away to get good detail. Secondly, and even more egregious, they are not well assembled in their respective sections. Everything is a few pages out of sync, so photos tend to crop up in adjacent sections for other plants, rather than the section (page) to which they belong. As an example, you might start a section on *A. parryi* v. *couseii*, but the photos of that plant do not appear until you are well into the section describing a totally different kind of *A. parryi*, some page or pages later. This is absolutely maddening, because you have no way, literally no way, to know if there are pictures at all and, if so, how many pages ahead they might be. It is absolutely unforgivable to organize a book this way, especially when touted as a tool for identification. Suppose you find the matching photo, what then? Flip back page after page, hoping you eventually find the section that goes with the photo? How ridiculous. I don't begrudge the author for putting the work out there, and there is tremendous knowledge here, but let's be honest. The book is not about cultivation, it isn't about history or biology, it's about identification and locality. If that's the case, it needs to be way, way better organized to be of any real use in that regard. Consider a thought experiment -you find yourself standing in front of an agave you can't identify, and you whip out this book. Now what? You can't go to the section for your location, because it isn't organized that way. You can't key off the characteristics of the plant, because it isn't keyed off that either. Suppose you even suspect the plant might be *A. parryi* of some kind or *A. havardiana*, and you just want to confirm which. Sadly, you can't even do that, because you have to know the trade name for either one. So that leaves you paging through the entire book, looking at pictures, maybe one per species at best, and some of

them ridiculously small. How again is this a great tool for identification? So again, a good read, lots of insights and covers some gaps in current literature too, but insofar as identification goes, absolute fail.

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