

The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Agave Americana variegated



Agave Montana



Agave ovatifolia

Growing your own pups is easier than you might think...

REGULAR readers will be only too aware of the large collection of succulents and agaves on show at Driftwood in the summer months. What they may not know is that many have to be protected for the winter months, as they don't like the cold and the wet.

My aeoniums were all gathered up and placed in the front and back porches of the house, or heated greenhouse, last month and now it's the turn of the agaves.

Up until this year, I have lifted and placed over 70 pots in varying sizes under cover.

Back in March, when I took them all out, I decided that the larger specimens would have to go in the ground, as it was just no longer viable for me to continue to carry on lifting them.

The larger agave Americana variegated, pictured above, were carefully planted adjacent to the large rowing boat. We are on chalk, so drainage is quite good as they do not like to get too wet.

Grow Agave Americana Variegata in well-drained soil in full sun.

When mature, like those I have planted, they should be able to cope with cold and frosts, provided they're protected from winter wet. Young plants will need extra protection so the smaller ones will still go under cover.

Agave plants spread without flowering, by growing offshoots, called pups. These pups grow into new plants once they are separated from the main plant. They are easily removed by exposing the connecting root and cutting through it.

You can then grow the pups by replanting them. You can see pictured some I have taken from an agave this week.

Just gently remove the main plant from the container and tease the pup away from the main roots, taking great care not to damage them.

You can see I managed to garner another dozen or so new plants, having harvested them from several plants.

You will find that some are really well established with their own roots while others just have a few strands on the core root. With care,

you can ensure all grow into healthy plants.

I have accumulated quite a number of different types of agave over the years, some more hardy than others. Above, you can see an Agave Ovatifolia or oval-leaved agave. It is a succulent perennial with rosettes, up to 1.5m high and 2m across, of almost white, pale blue-green leaves. The leaves are broad and almost egg-shaped in outline, with only small teeth on the scalloped edges but tipped at the ends with very sharp spines.

Flowering stems, when produced, are 1.5-2m high with yellow-green flowers in summer, however they are unlikely to flower in the UK. This species is much more tolerant of cold and moist climates than many other species and is best grown in full sun, in sharply drained dry soil.

Mine is in a container and will stay out in the beach garden for the first time this winter. It is the perfect choice for city and courtyard gardens, coastal plots, gravel garden or patios and containers.

Another gorgeous specimen is Agave Montana or mountain agave. This is a rosette-forming, evergreen, perennial succulent to about 1.5m.

The leaves are light greyish-green, edged and tipped with reddish spines.

Again, unlikely to flower in the UK but in the wild it produces huge, club-shaped inflorescences made up of tightly clustered yellow flowers on short branches supported by a scaly, 5m high trunk.

They are harder than most agaves, and may survive outdoors in a warm position in very well-drained, slightly acid soil in full sun. Mine is going to stay out this winter as it is just so heavy now to carry.

Any agave can be grown in a container, but the smaller varieties are the most popular. Agave plants love to be root bound, so growing them in pots make these plants excellent candidates for houseplants too.

All container-grown agave plants need a soil that dries slowly but drains quickly. Mine being left outside have the leaves growing



Geoff and baby agaves

over the edges of the pots, which will help prevent rain from reaching the compost and this keep the roots dry through the winter too. The pot doesn't need to be very deep. When planting your agave in containers, make sure the crown remains above soil level to prevent crown rot.

As with many succulent plants, agaves are shallow-rooted and can grow in any size container because they don't need much soil.

Do take care to ensure they do not get too wet. The first sign is usually light spotting on the leaves where it's losing bits of colour. At this point, the leaves may also appear swollen. As the overwatering progresses, the leaves turn yellow or somewhat translucent and feel mushy.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk



Removing the pups from agave Americana