

YUCCA

Yucca Agavaceae

Common Names:

Yucca, Adam's needle, bear's grass

The yucca is fascinating because of the manner in which it is pollinated and the way that it received its name.

The *Pronuba yuccasella* may be one of the most important moths in our part of the world. The female has the responsibility of pollinating our yuccas. In the evening she gathers pollen from the anthers of the flower and forms a sticky ball a bit larger than her head. She then wedges it under her chin and climbs the pistil of a different flower. She injects her eggs into the pistil and puts the pollen ball on top of the stigma wedging it firmly in place. This is the only way that the flower is pollinated. Soon the flower withers and the moth larvae hatch, eat some of the seeds in the pod and drop to the ground. They then spin a cocoon and will later become moths. The remaining seeds make new plants.



Picture from:
the real dirt: A Gardening Handbook for Parker County

Historically, the yucca was brought to England from the West Indies “by a servant of master Thomas Edwards, an Apothecary of Exeter” and given to John Gerard. Gerard thought the plant a true “yuca,” something Indians use for bread making, called Cassava. Englishman John Parkinson noted that the yucca dropped its flowers without making seed in England. He also knew it wasn't a cassava but didn't know what else to call it and so the name yucca remained. It was noted in 1728 by William Byrd of Virginia that Indians used the fibers to make cloth “which they wear about their middles, for decency's sake.” The Yucca was not renamed and received a couple of new ones. “Silk grass because the fibers were woven, used for making ropes and baskets by the Indians. The fruits, called “datile,” are edible and the roots have saponin that can be made into a soap-like lather. “Adam's needle” is another name given the yucca because of its spiny leaves.

The yucca can be propagated from root cuttings and by seed.

Be sure to take time to enjoy the yucca in our area and perhaps thank a little moth for the plant.

“100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names”

by *Diana Wells*