



Friends of SNOW CANYON

What's That Plant... Yucca or Agave?

Yucca ... Snow Canyon State Park is home to two species of **Yucca**, commonly called **Utah Yucca** and **Banana (Datil) Yucca**.

These plants were revered by Native Americans as they provided a valuable source of food, fiber and soap. Most plant parts could be eaten including the buds, flowers, stalks and fruit. The strong fibers in the leaves were used to make baskets, nets, mats, rope, cloth and sandals. Pounding their fleshy roots in water produces a sudsy lather. This soap was used to wash hair, clothes and in spiritual cleansing ceremonies.

Agave ... **Utah Agave** is the only species of **Agave** found growing in the Park. Look for it upland in slick rock areas.

Historically, Agaves were also one of the most important plant groups providing both food and fiber. All Agaves are **monocarpic** — plants that flower, set seeds and then die. Although the mother plant dies after flowering, any offsets (pups) will continue to grow and the plant's life cycle continues.

Banana or Datil Yucca *Yucca baccata*

- **Foliage:** The blue green leaves are stiff and sharply pointed. They are broad (1-2" wide) and 12-40" in length. The strap like leaves form a dense, basal cluster on a short stem.
- **Flowers:** In springtime, a dense cluster of bell shaped, creamy white flowers with purple tones appear. The flower stalk barely rises above the leaves.
- **Fruit:** The name Banana Yucca comes from the resemblance of its fruit to a banana. They grow 4-9 " long and are fleshy, tasting similar to a sweet potato. They were eaten green or dried and stored for winter consumption by Native Americans.



Along with Joshua Tree (*Zucca brevifolia*), Yucca and Agave are now classified as members of the Asparagus family — *Asparagaceae*.

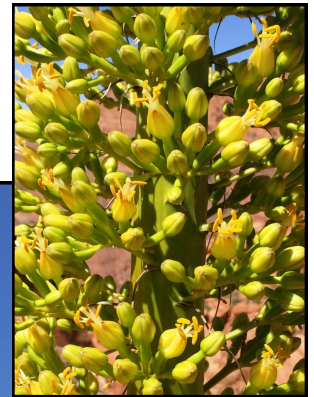
Utah Yucca

Yucca utahensis

- **Foliage:** The narrow, pointed leaves have a sharp tip and reach 2 feet in length.
- **Flowers and Fruit:** Towering stalks of creamy white flowers appear in May to June high above the foliage, resembling large candles. Individual flowers are 2" across. A dried capsule with wafer-like black seeds often persists through the winter.



The showy white Yucca blossoms are pollinated by only one species of a nocturnal moth, aptly named the Yucca moth.



Utah Agave

Agave utahensis

- **Foliage:** Succulent, evergreen leaves (20" long) are upward curving with a long, dark spine at the tip. They form a compact, globular rosette.
- **Flowers and Fruit:** Plants may not flower for 15-25 years. Then in spring, a yellow-green flower stalk appears and grows over a foot a day to a height of 12-15 feet! There are numerous yellow flowers. The fruit is a brown capsule with black seeds that may persist for years.

