

Winter-Spring Bloomer

Sansevieria hyacinthoides

Family: Asparagaceae



Late January

**Bowstring-hemp, snake-plant,
mother-in-law's tongue**

Synonyms (Discarded Names): *Acyntha guineensis*, *Aletris guineensis*, *Cordyline guineensis*, *Sansevieria guineensis*, *S. metallica*, *S. thyrsiflora*

U.S.D.A. Zone: 9b-11 (Minimum 26°F)

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Growth Rate: Slow

Leaf Type: Simple, linear

Light Requirements: Medium, high

Salt Tolerance: High

Drought Tolerance: High

Soil Requirement: Wide, well-drained

Nutritional Requirements: Low

Major Potential Pests: Agave weevil

Propagation: Cuttings, division

Human Hazards: Fibrous irritant

Common Uses: Rock gardens, ground-cover, container, foliage plant



Mid January

Introduction

Sansevieria is native to regions of south tropical, and southern Africa. This includes the countries of Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa. These are mostly xeric plants of dry climates and rough terrain. They also thrive in moist conditions. Estimates of the number of species vary from about 55 to 70 or more. Some species have become widely naturalized in parts of the world. Escaped to south and central Florida, *Sansevieria hyacinthoides* is listed as a Category II invasive plant by the [Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council](#). It is often listed as *S. trifasciata* a separate and distinct species.

Ecological Significance

S. hyacinthoides was introduced to Florida around 1800 as an ornamental and fiber crop. Escaping cultivation and running wild in many locations in south Florida, it was deemed a nuisance in 1951. It commonly occurs in the understory of maritime hammocks in the Keys and Ten Thousand Islands. It is naturalized in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Australia. Snake plant spreads by seeds, rhizome and discarded garden waste.



Snake plant encroachment, Sanibel Island

Foliage and Growth Habit

Snake plant is a succulent, stemless perennial. Leaves are erect, entire, rigid and often with a slight twist. They are clustered in a loose basal rosette of generally 1 to 4 leaves that spreads slightly at the top. The blade is linear to oblanceolate-obovate and is channeled towards its base. Leaves are up to 50 inches tall and 4 inches broad. They are fibrous and mottled with gray and white striated, horizontal chevron stripes. The pattern becomes less conspicuous with age. Beneath the soil are fleshy rhizomes and fibrous roots. The rhizomes emerge white and mature bright orange. Stout and creeping rhizomes eventually produce a dense groundcover that effectively exclude competition.



Tip with exposed fiber



Horizontal, chevron stripes



Channeling of the lower leaf



Rhizome connecting two upright suckers

Flowers, Flowering and Fruit

The inflorescence is a scape that arises from the ground amongst the leaves. It is a showy, unbranched raceme up to 3 feet tall with tubular flowers to 2 inches long. Petals are off white and green at the base. They have protruding stamens and pistil. Flowering typically occurs from December to June. A scape will persist for two to three weeks flowering from the bottom upwards. Fruit is an orange to reddish berry to 0.25 inch across, containing 1 to 3 hard, globose seeds.



Flower buds at the top of the scape



Flowers on scape

Planting and Control

The plant is generally not recommended for landscape planting because of its invasive tendencies. It is a tough plant. It will thrive in containers indoors under conditions that would otherwise kill other plants. The snake plant is well adapted to the soils and climates of southern Florida. It grows well in sandy ground and in full sun to partial shade. The tough leathery leaves and stout, extensive rhizomes make plants difficult to control and manual removal may be required. It may take 6 to 12 months to die after herbicide applications and follow-up treatments are often necessary.

[The Agave weevil](#) is an infrequent but major pest that can kill plant. Fibers from the leaves may become attached to ones skin causing a brief irritation.



Sanibel Island, late December

References

Langeland, K. A, Cherry, H. M., McCormick, C.M. and Burks, K.A. 2008. Identification and Biology of Nonnative Plants in Florida Natural Areas. IFAS Communication Services, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida

Llamas Kristen. 2003. Tropical Flower Plants: A Guide to Identification and Cultivation. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon

Staples, G.W. and Herbst, D. R. A Tropical Garden Flora: Plants cultivated in the Hawaiian Island and other tropical places. 2005. Bishop Museum Press, Honolulu, Hawaii

Useful Links

[Florida Native Plants Fact Sheets](#)

[Blood Lily \(*Scadoxus multiflorus*\)](#)

[Carrion Flower \(*Stapelia gigantean*\)](#)

[Eulophia graminea](#)

[Hedge Cactus \(*Cereus hildmannianus*\)](#)

[Leafless Beaked Orchid \(*Sacoila lanceolata*\)](#)

[Monk Orchid \(*Oeceoclades manculata*\)](#)

All pictures were taken by Stephen H. Brown

This fact sheet was reviewed by Peggy Cruz and Karen Headlee, Lee County Extension; Pat Rooney, Lee County Master Gardener

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