

AGAVE, formed from *αγαυος*, *admirable*, in *Botany*, a genus of the *hexandria monogynia* class and order, of the natural order of *coronaria*, and of the *bromelia* of *Jussieu*. Its characters are, that it has no calyx; that the corolla is one-petalled, and funnel-shaped, with a six-parted equal border, and lanceolate erect parts; the stamina are filiform, erect filaments, longer than the corolla; the anthers linear, shorter than the filaments, and versatile; the pistillum is an oblong germen, growing thinner towards both ends, inferior; the style filiform, of the length of the stamina, and three-cornered; the stigma headed and three-cornered; the pericarpium is an oblong, three-cornered, three-celled, three-valved capsule; and the seeds are numerous. The species enumerated

enumerated by Martyn are six, and in the Linnæan system by Gmelin seven. The first is the *A. Americana*, or Great American aloe, whose stems, when vigorous, rise upwards of twenty feet high, (one in the king of Prussia's garden rose to 40 feet,) and branch out on every side, so as to form a kind of pyramid, composed of greenish yellow flowers, which stand erect and come out in thick clusters at every joint. The seeds do not come to maturity in England. When this plant flowers, it makes a beautiful appearance; and if it be protected from the cold in autumn, a succession of new flowers will be produced for near three months, in favourable seasons. It has been a common error, that this plant does not flower till it is 100 years old; the truth is, that the flowering depends on its growth; so that in hot countries it will flower in a few years; but in colder climates the growth is slower, and it will be much longer before it shoots up a stem. The first European who possessed an American aloe, is said to have been Cortufus, who had one in 1561; and Parkinson reports that it was first brought into Spain. The first that flowered in England is said to have been Mr. Cowell's, at Hoxton, in 1729, but they have occurred so often since that time, that they are now scarcely considered as rarities. Few of the variety with yellow-edged leaves have yet blossomed. There are hedges of the common agave in Spain, Portugal, Sicily, and Calabria; it flourishes also about Naples, and in other parts of Italy. The juice of the leaves, strained, and reduced to a thick consistence by being exposed to the sun, may be made up into balls, by means of lye-ashes. It will lather with salt-water as well as fresh. The leaves, instead of passing between the rollers of a mill, may be pounded in a wooden mortar, and the juice brought to a consistence by the sun or by boiling. A gallon of juice will yield about a pound of soft extract. The leaves are also used for scouring pewter, or other kitchen utensils, and floors. In Algarvia, where pasture is scarce, they are cut in thin transverse slices, and given to cattle. The inward substance of the decayed stalk will serve for tinder. The fibres of the leaves, separated by bruising and steeping in water, and afterwards beating them, will make a thread for common uses. The process for this purpose at Loule, in Portugal is as follows: Having plucked the largest and best leaves, one of them is laid on a square board which a person presses obliquely between his breast and the ground, and he scrapes it with a square iron bar held in both hands; thus all the juices and pulp are pressed out, and the nerves of the leaf only remain, which may then be divided into very fine threads. These are hung over a thin cord to dry. This thread is not strong, and easily rots in water, but it consists of straight fibres, and is applicable to many purposes. Link's Travels in Portugal by Hinckley, p. 445. Varieties of the common American agave, with gold and silver striped leaves, are not now uncommon in the English gardens. The Karratto agave is a variety brought from St. Christopher's, and the name is given to other species of this genus, and has leaves from 2½ feet to 3 long, and about 3 inches broad, ending in a black spine, and more erect than those of the others. This sort has not flowered in England. 2. *A. vivipara*, or *childing* agave or aloe, stemless, with toothed leaves, never grows to a large size; as it produces no suckers from the root, it cannot be increased till it flowers. This plant grows in St. Domingo and Jamaica, and its resinous juice forms a part of the caballine aloes of the shops. It was first cultivated by Mr. Miller, in 1731. 3. *A. virginica* resembles the first so much as not to be distinguishable from it, except by good judges. The leaves are narrower and of a paler colour; the stems are not so high, nor do they branch in the same manner; but the flowers are collected into a close head at the top. It

was introduced in 1765, into the Kew garden, by Mr. J. Cree. 4. *A. lurida* has two varieties, viz. the *Vera-Cruz* agave, which resembles the first, with thinner leaves, indentures at the edges much closer and not so deep, and blacker spines; and the *rigid* or *narrow-leaved* agave, with long, narrow, stiff leaves, entire and terminated by a stiff black spine. It was cultivated in 1731, by Mr. Miller. 5. *A. tuberosa*, or tuberous-rooted agave, has the leaves indented at their edges, and each indenture terminates in a spine; the root is thick, and swells close above the surface of the ground; in other respects it agrees with the last species; it has two varieties, viz. the *single-thorned* and *double-thorned* agave. It grows in the Antilles, and has been cultivated at Paris under the name of *A. angustifolia*. 6. *A. foetida* has long, narrow, stiff leaves, of a pale green colour, waved on their edges, those on the side spread open, and those in the centre closely folded over each other, and encompassing the bud. The juice of the leaves has a bad smell. It is seldom more than 3 feet high, but the flower stem rises near 20, and branches out in the manner of the first, but more horizontally, and the flowers are smaller and of a greener colour. This species grows in the woods of St. Domingo. A plant of this species, which flowered in 1755, and then died, was cultivated in 1690 in the Royal garden at Hampton Court. Of the leaves are formed ropes and various kinds of cloth, which serve for garments and other purposes. 7. *A. cubensis* has ciliato-spinose leaves and an hexapetalous corolla. M. La Marck makes this a variety of the *A. mexicana*, the Metl, or Maguel of the Mexicans; it grows in Mexico and the island of Cuba. The mucilaginous juice is used as soap for washing, and the leaves are formed into a thread, which serves them for ropes, cloth, and other uses.

The first and third species are hardy. Those of the former sort will bear the open air in mild seasons; but require being sheltered in the winter. They are propagated by off-sets. The third species generally puts out suckers enough for propagation. They should be planted in pots filled with light sandy earth, housed in winter, and have little wet. In the summer they may be exposed to the open air, and remain thus till October. The Vera-Cruz agave should be longer in the house, as it is more tender. The second, fourth, and sixth, never produce off-sets or suckers from the root; but when they flower, there will be abundance of them; but they may be propagated by taking off some of the larger roots, when the plants are shifted. The second, fifth, and sixth, with the Karatto and rigid agaves, are more tender than the others, and cannot be preserved in winter, unless they are placed in a warm stove, nor will they thrive if set abroad in the summer. They require a light sandy earth, and should have little wet in winter; but in summer they may be gently watered twice a week. They must be shifted every summer into fresh pots; but the pots should be small, that their roots may be confined; otherwise the plants will not thrive. Linnæus has separated this genus from the *ALOE*, because the stamina and style are extended much longer than the corolla, and the corolla rests upon the germ. Besides, all the agaves have their central leaves, closely folding over each other, and embracing the flower-stem in the centre; so that these never flower till all the leaves are expanded, and when the flower is past, the plants die. Whereas the flower-stem of the aloe is produced on one side of the centre, annually from the same plant, and the leaves are more expanded than in this genus. Martyn's Miller's Dict.