

Agave americana 'Marginata' Variegated Century Plant¹

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Introduction

Variegated century plant is common in cultivation, having twisted green leaves with marginal bands of bright yellow (Figure 1). The leaves gracefully fold back on themselves giving the appearance of giant bands of striped ribbon. Its tight rosette of stiff, sword-shaped leaves, each up to six feet long and 10 inches wide, makes a dramatic statement in the landscape and is much favored for use in rock gardens. The sharp spine at the tip of its toothed leaves is often removed to protect people and pets. Locate it at least six feet away from walks and other areas where people could contact the spiny foliage.



Figure 1. Full form—*Agave americana* 'Marginata': variegated century plant.



Figure 2. Flower—*Agave americana* 'Marginata': variegated century plant.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Agave americana* 'Marginata'

Pronunciation: uh-GAW-vee uh-mair-rick-KAY-nuh

Common name(s): Variegated century plant

Family: *Agavaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to North America and Mexico

Invasive potential: not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by UF/IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)

Uses: border; accent; mass planting

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Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 6 to 8 feet

Spread: 6 to 10 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: spiny

Leaf shape: lanceolate

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches

Leaf color: variegated

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: summer-flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; usually with one stem/trunk

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: unknown

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Century plant is a hardy survivor, tolerating heat, drought, and salty seaside conditions. It grows best in full sun but can adapt to shade. After 10 years or more (though not a century), a lofty flower spike is produced, sometimes reaching a height of 20 feet or more, with terminal panicles of pale yellow to white blooms. The plant dies after blooming. The plant is typically used in residences as a free-standing specimen, not planted in mass. Due to its large size, most residences only need one of these. Larger commercial landscapes have room for multiple mass plantings which can create a dramatic impact.

Variegated century plant is propagated by detaching the well-rooted suckers appearing at the base, or by plantlets formed on the flower spike.

Design Considerations

The bold form, coarse texture, and dramatic color of the variegated century plant make it perfect as a specimen plant in highly visible spaces in the landscape. Use with companion plants that are softer, with small foliage and mounding or spreading forms to contrast and highlight the stiff upright form of the leaves. Pairing with plants that have more texture in the foliage will also contrast with the smooth, stiff leaves. To highlight the bright yellow bands in the leaves use dark green foliage or plants with small to medium flowers with cool bright colors, such as purples and blues. Another option is to complement the yellow with

golden-colored, wispy grasses. Large masses of low-growing companion plants around the base or in front of the century plant will create a nice setting to show off the form.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.