

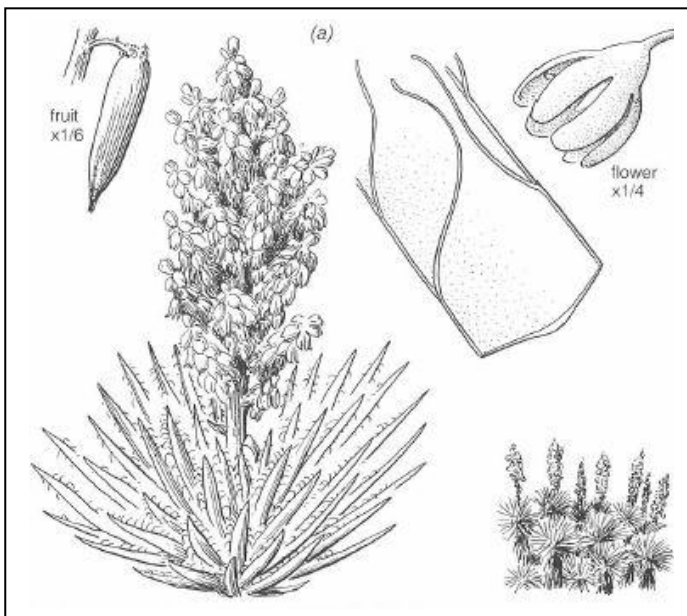


Banana Yucca (*yucca baccata*)

Known as an evergreen, the banana yucca displays an elaborate bouquet of wildflowers during the spring time. Although the banana yucca bears fruit, it certainly does not look like the typical grocery store banana. Unlike most yucca plants, the banana yucca produces a sweet, pulpy fruit that tastes somewhat like a sweet potato. Native to the American southwest, the plant was a valuable resource to the Navajo and Apache Native Americans.

Description: Growing up to 4 feet tall, the banana yucca develops spiny leaves and a tall flowering stem. The stem produces large yellow-white flowers that often share a reddish-purple pigment. The base features 6 sepals that are joined together. Plants may grow separately or grow in several clumps.

Location: Found throughout the American southwest, the banana yucca is distributed throughout Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas and Utah. Traditional habitat occurs in dry plains and hilly grasslands. Like most desert dwelling plants, Banana Yuccas do not require a lot of water and will not survive cold temperatures. With a high tolerance for CaCO₃ (calcium carbonate), the plants sustain rugged, dry, rocky desert lifestyles.



Yucca plant illustration, Flowers of the Southwest Deserts



*Yucca leaf woven sandal found in Zion National Park
Credit: National Park Service*

Uses: A vital resource for Native Americans, the banana yucca provided food from its fruit and seeds that were generally roasted, ground and pressed together to form cakes. The cakes were then sun-dried and preserved for winter months. With leaves so durable, they were gathered to create ropes, cloth and shoes. Soap was formed by a combination of water, ground up roots, and leaves.

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