



Utah Yucca (*Yucca utahensis*)

A member of the Asparagales family, the Utah yucca is a flowering desert shrub native to southwestern Utah. It is easily identified by its sharp leaves and towering stalk with clustered flowers.

Utah yuccas were a critical resource for Native Americans as there are many uses for the plant. Its leaves, fruit, and roots provided essential tools, nutrition, and material for a sustainable lifestyle in Utah's southwestern deserts.

Description: Known as a tall desert shrub, the Utah yucca grows up to 15 feet tall. Cream colored tulip-like flowers grow along the tall stalks. Pointed leaves are very sharp and contain strand-like fibers that curl up from their edges. Stems grow singularly or in clusters. Pollinating moths consume the Utah yucca's dry seeds that are contained within a capsule-like fruit. Roots are heavy and thick as they store enough water to supply sufficient hydration throughout droughts. Leaves also store water and can drop during dry seasons to prevent water transpiration.

Location: Yuccas generally grow from low desert elevations to elevations as high as 8500 feet. Utah yuccas are prevalent in the deserts of Utah, Nevada and Arizona. These plants prefer arid regions and thrive in sandy soils. Yuccas are known to be fire adaptable and have the ability to grow well after fires.

Uses: Native Americans utilized all parts of the Utah yucca. Food was made from its stalks, flowers, buds, and fruits. Roots were crushed and diluted in water to produce a sudsy soap-like substance that was used for washing purposes. Sharp, sword like leaves were used for puncturing meat and other materials. In addition, leaf fibers were used as twine for constructing baskets, sandals, and more.

Sources:

"Range Plants of Southern Utah, Yucca." *Utah State University*. 17 Jan. 2019. <http://extension.usu.edu/rangeplants/shrubs-and-trees/Yucca>

"Southwest Evergreens." *High Plains Gardening*. 17 Jan. 2019. <http://www.highplainsgardening.com/plant-lists/southwest-evergreens-yuccas>