

Growing Agave From Seed

With the vast majority of succulent plant seeds the key words are Warm, Close and Bright. Sow the seeds on the top of a good quality compost and water (spraying is best) with a dilute fungicide solution (Chinosol or a copper based compound). Seal in a plastic bag and place somewhere warm and light (20 – 30 Deg C).

Germination given ideal conditions as listed above should take 5 – 21 days. Some species can take longer, but in the main I have tried to avoid these in the mix as they need wholly different conditions in order to break the dormancy of the seed. You will see a grass-like, single seed leaf emerge from the seed.

Growth is quite fast and by the end of the first year you should have plants that look like miniature Agaves. Pot up when large enough into good quality cactus compost.

Some species are almost hardy, especially those from the inland, higher altitude habitats. Subsequent growth (from the 2nd year) will depend upon the species. Some will stay as miniatures (no more than 30 cm across) whereas others can achieve giant proportions (3 metres or more – but only after many years).

Growing Agaves Outside in Temperate Regions

First thing to note is that the biggest single killer of these plants is a combination of cold and damp. The plants may cope with any single aspect, but to the two things combined will spell the end of your plant.

That warning aside, providing suitable conditions for your agaves to grow outside (either permanently or temporarily) is fairly straightforward.

For permanent plantings, you need to create an area of free draining soil, where your agave can thrive. By free draining, I mean really free draining, so dig a hole about 4 feet deep and 4 feet across (minimum) and replace the soil with a coarse mix of broken brick, grit, coarse sand, rock and of course some soil. The amount of soil in the back fill need only be 33%, the rest should be the other material mentioned. This will stop the plant from having wet roots, which come the winter will be the death of it. If you skimp at this stage, you will be doing yourself no favours.

For pot grown specimens, choose a large earthenware/clay pot. Fill with a 50/50 mix of potting compost and grit.

When planting in either case, add a layer of coarse grit around the neck of the plant, to prevent water from accumulating here.

In the winter, bring the potted specimens under cover if possible or surround the pot with sacking or bubble wrap and cover the top of the plant with material to keep the wet off. For permanent specimens, cover the crown of the plant with straw or sacking.