



Banana yucca – *Yucca baccata*

Other names: Blue yucca , Datil Yucca, Fleshy-fruited yucca, Spanish bayonet, Spanish dagger or amole

The Yucca is the state flower of New Mexico. The Banana yucca is native to the Americas, like all other yucca species and prevalent in the southwestern deserts of the United States.



Fig 1: Banana yuccas in the Franklins

It is an evergreen succulent, belonging to the Agavaceae family. It usually has no stem and grows in clusters to about 2 inches high. The leaves have pointed tips that are

needle-sharp and can become about 30 inches long. In the spring, the plant produces an up to 40 inches tall stalk with white, purple tinged flowers, which can be eaten at special times before the summer rains. They are formed on the stalk from its base on and remain mostly covered by the leaves. Not every year a flower stalk is produced.



Fig 2: *Yucca baccata* range map. USDA PLANTS Database.



Fig 3: White, bell shaped flowers; Fig 4: The fruits resemble thick bananas

The Banana yucca is still liked as an exotic food source. The fleshy fruits look like fat, green bananas and are sweet tasting. They can be eaten raw, roasted or baked and mashed into a pulp with the seeds removed. Cooked fruits can be turned into syrup, and dried fruits can be pulverized and dissolved in water to prepare a drink (Chicha de Yuca), which can be fermented or not. Young leaves can be cooked and used to prepare a soup. Recipes with yucca ingredients are available on the internet.

Traditionally the leaf blades were further used to make baskets or brushes. Through scraping the flesh of the leaves, a tough needle with threads was produced. After cutting a leaf off the plant, a rock is carefully pounded on it to soften the flesh and scrape it off. Care has to be taken to not damage the needle. This procedure usually results in a needle with several threads. Those can be trimmed off, with just one left attached.

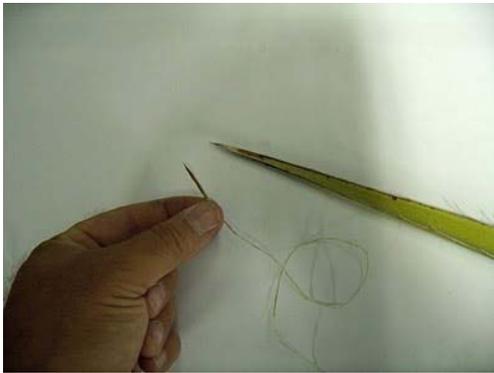


Fig 5: Needle and Thread are continuous.

Picture from: Sword of Survival

How to make cordage from yucca leave you can learn through a video on youtube (for example @

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eYGIC8HPQk&index=8&list=HL1402889761>

.The roots had and still have special uses as soap.

References:

- Desert USA @ <http://www.desertusa.com/flora/datil-yucca.html>
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center @ http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=YUBA
- USDA forest service @ http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/yucca_baccata.shtml
- USDA plants database @ <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=YUBA> and @ <http://herb.umd.umich.edu/herb/search.pl?searchstring=Yucca+baccata>
- Sword of Survival @ <http://www.swordofsurvival.com/2010/08/yucca-needle-and-thread.html>
- Texas Native Plants Database @ <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals/nativeshrubs/yuccabaccat.htm>



Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition

Yucca baccata – Banana yucca

Questions:

- Name the plant family to which the Banana yucca belongs.
- Where on the plant are the flowers produced and how often?
- What importance did the yucca leaves have for the indigenous people?
- Which part of the Banana yucca is favored for food production?
- Name other uses of the Banana yucca.
- Which State has the Yucca as its state flower?



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Questions & Answers:

- Name the plant family to which the Banana yucca belongs.
 - o Agavaceae
- Where on the plant are the flowers produced and how often?
 - o The flowers are produced on a stalk that remains mostly covered by the leaves; not every year;
- What importance did the yucca leaves have for the indigenous people?
 - o To produce needle and thread or cordage from them;
- Which part of the Banana yucca is favored for food production?
 - o The fruits are especially delicious.
- Name other uses of the Banana yucca.
 - o Roots are used for soap production. Baskets and brushes could be produced from the leaves.
- Which State has the Yucca as its state flower?
 - o New Mexico

