

November Succulent of the Month

Kristi Schmidt

Name: 'Sharkskin Agave'

Synonyms: Agave 'Sharkskin Shoes', Agave 'Ruth Bancroft', Hort., 'Sharkskin Shoes', Agave nickelsiae x scabra 'Sharkskin', Agave asperima x ferdinandi-regis, Agave ferdinandi-regis x scabra, Agave asperima x victoriae-reginae, Agave scabra x victoriae-reginae

Family: Agavaceae

Origin: Mexico – as a naturally occurring hybrid

I have been in possession of this interesting agave since this January. It is supposed to reach its mature size very slowly eventually growing to 2-3 feet high by 3-4 feet wide. The leaves have smooth black margins each ending with a very sharp terminal spine. This is a medium size agave. It is darker but muted gray-green agave that grows into symmetrical shape. The texture of each leaf feels rough like the finest sandpaper hence the comparison to shark skin. It reproduces offsets from roots, often referred to as agave pups.



Photo Credit: <https://www.finegardening.com/plant/agave-sharkskin>

Just like most agave plants, this plant thrives in full sun and very little water. I have been battling leaf lesions that seem to appear when the weather gets colder and wetter. My plant is potted in well-drained soil, a mixture of pumice, succulent soil mix, expanded shale a little bit of local clay from my backyard. One day, this plant might be planted in my backyard, and I want it to get familiar with the local soil composition.



Photo Credit: Kristi Schmidt

Most literature claims Agave Sharkskin is hardy to 20-25F although some sources listed it as low as 10-15F. This plant is a hybrid of the Agave ferdinandii-regis and Agave scabra.

A.ferdinandii-regis is a form of A. Victoria-reginae, yet these two were once considered separate species. Both tolerate cold temperatures very well along with A.scabra.

Therefore, I have high hopes this Agave Sharkskin should stand strong in temperatures below 32F as well.

This naturally occurring hybrid originated in Mexico. When shopping around I have seen it being labeled as Agave ferdinandi x Agave scabra or Agave victoria-reginae x asperima.

Many places have collections of this plant, but two most famous ones that are tied to its origin are The Huntington Botanic Garden and Ruth Bancroft Garden. Most likely there are multiple collections of this hybrid which means not all the plants are identical.

Quote from San Marcos Growers: "Another bit of confusion is the name Agave 'Ruth Bancroft' that has been applied to this plant. Although some of the plants in cultivation have originated from the Ruth Bancroft Garden, this name is confusing and not supported by Brian Kemble, Ruth Bancroft Garden Plant Curator and

Assistant Director, who notes that there is another Agave introduced by the garden that already goes by this name. Whatever you call this plant, it sure is beautiful.”



References:

- <https://www.smgrowers.com/info/AgaveSharkskin.asp>
- https://www.smgrowers.com/products/plants/plantdisplay.asp?plant_id=3322
- <https://shop.cacti.com/landscape-succulents/agave-sharkskin-aka-sharkskin/>

