



MOJAVE DESERT NATIVE PLANTS

MOJAVE YUCCA

Yucca schidigera

Mojave yuccas grow throughout the Mojave Desert below 5000 feet (1500 m). Trunks commonly grow to between 3 and 6 feet (1-2 m) but can be more than 10 feet (3 m) in height. This plant can live to an age of 100 years or more.

Cream colored flowers appear on a long stalk in March and April. Blooming is affected by rainfall and temperature and may not occur in especially dry years. Pollination of all yuccas is performed only by the yucca moth (*Tegeticula*). After mating, the female gathers a ball of pollen from a yucca flower, flies to another yucca plant and lays her eggs in the flower, assuring pollination. Hatching larva feed on the flower but leave plenty of seeds for distribution.

For Native Americans, this plant could be considered the most important source of raw material. Whole leaves were used for house construction. Fruit pods were roasted in hot coals or eaten raw if necessary. Fruit was gathered in April and May, after which fruits were too bitter. Roots were scraped and mashed and, by adding water, used as a soap for washing clothes. An important part of the Mojave yucca is the curled fiber found on the leaves. Used for bow strings, sandals, rope, and baskets, this material was often stored for later use.

