

Yucca species

Yucca brevifolia

The Joshua Tree, *Yucca brevifolia* - every bit as much an icon of the western deserts of the US as the grass tree or the ghost gum are to Australia. Technically not a tree but a member of the Agave family and the largest of all Yuccas, it calls the higher elevations of the Mohave Desert in the Southwestern U.S. home. It was named by the early Mormons who thought the outstretched branches resembled the biblical Joshua holding up his arms to heaven and welcoming them to a new land.

An evergreen species, it is very slow-growing but will ultimately reach a height of 7 to 10m...in your grandchildren's lifetime! And "what you see is what you get" when you grow it - a heavy trunk and sparse heavy branches. It has short broad sword-shaped leaves that cluster at the end of the branches, the flowers are produced in July to September in greenish-white footlong clusters.

Joshua tree thrives in any soil but prefers a sandy loam and full exposure to the sun. It does not tolerate heavy clay soils but can be grown in anything from a light to a heavy soil and a well drained soil is not required. Plants are hardier when they are grown on poor sandy soils and prefers a hot dry position, disliking heavy rain. Established plants are very drought resistant and are hardy in a temperature range of -9°C to 49°C.

Propagation

Sow seed in the spring. Pre-soaking the seed for 24 hours in warm water may reduce the germination time. It usually germinates within 1 - 12 months if kept at a temperature of 20°C. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and grow them on in pots for their first one or two years. Plant them out into their permanent positions in early Summer. In cooler climates they may need some protection initially - a simple pane of glass is usually sufficient.