



Eric Hofley / Michigan Gardener

This 'Color Guard' yucca survives each winter in a concrete container that has a fast-draining soil mix.



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While yuccas are mostly known for their distinctive foliage, their flowers look beautiful against a green background.



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'Bright Edge'



Walters Gardens, Inc.

'Color Guard'



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Use yuccas like this 'Color Guard' in mixed borders with perennials and small shrubs.



Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc.

'Color Guard' displays impressive winter interest as the foliage is tinged rosy pink during cold weather.



Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc.

Yucca rostrata 'Sapphire Skies' sports powder blue leaves.

plant focus

Yucca

Yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*) is one of the most durable perennials for the garden. Plants are hardy to zone 4, allowing them to overwinter effortlessly in upper and lower Michigan. They also thrive in southern climates such as Florida and Texas. Their Southwestern look is unmistakable in any landscape where they can live for decades with no maintenance whatsoever. The long, pointed leaves are usually green, radiating from the ground wherever the roots are established. Leaf tips are dangerously pointed and justify the common name “Adam’s needle.” The deer-resistant foliage persists all winter long, thus giving yucca its “evergreen” designation.

Other evergreens such as boxwood, yews, azaleas, junipers, spruce, etc. provide a completely different texture. And although yuccas can produce flowers, it is the unusual texture of the leaves that makes them most useful in the landscape. Yucca foliage perfectly exemplifies coarse foliage. It is this coarse foliage that contrasts very well with more bold-leaved plants such as hostas, ligularias, viburnums or fine-leaved plants such as junipers, ferns, and astilbes. Like other “shrubs,” yuccas can be planted in mass where space permits. They also serve well as a single specimen in the rock garden or perennial border.

Yuccas will typically form coarse clumps 2-1/2 feet tall and wide in full sun or even full shade. They will tolerate all kinds of soil except for those that remain water-saturated for long stretches of time. Mature plants are drought tolerant and will even tolerate competition from tree roots in either sun or shade. Yuccas grown in a sunnier position will produce creamy white flower stalks that range from 3 to 8 feet tall in July and August. The spent stalks should be removed at the base when the flowers have finished, as the fruiting stalk is unsightly and will persist for years.

Although the all-green Adam’s needle is useful as a textural plant, there are other varieties with more striking foliage. ‘Color Guard’ has glowing, canary yellow-

centered leaves edged in green. The result is electric in the summer garden. In winter and during cool weather, the yellow stripe blushes rose. The 24-inch tall plants are exceptional as specimens and may even be used in spring containers as a spike replacement.

‘Bright Edge’ is quite similar but with green-centered leaves edged with creamy gold. It grows to a height of 18 inches with flowers only 3 feet tall. Although ‘Color Guard’ and ‘Bright Edge’ are slightly smaller than the species, their flowers, durability, drought tolerance, and deer resistance are the same.

The newest hardy yucca on the market is *Yucca rostrata* ‘Sapphire Skies.’ This powder blue-leaved selection has non-threatening flexible foliage and is hardy to zone 5. ‘Sapphire Skies’ is best positioned in full sun with well-drained soil. Its real claim to fame is that this is a trunk-forming species; experts say that in time, the blue foliage will protrude from the top of a true trunk. Being such a new variety, I have yet to learn of a Michigan-grown specimen beginning its journey into “trunkhood.” But like most gardeners, I will keep an optimistic, open mind until experience proves that the experts are incorrect.

Yuccas will eventually produce clumps that may require dividing, moving, or perhaps elimination. I have often heard of attempts to relocate or eliminate a yucca that initially seemed successful. However, the remaining roots typically produce young yucca shoots that develop into mature clumps. To completely eradicate a yucca, one typically has to remove roots repeatedly or maybe even apply herbicide... a few times. Needless to say, yuccas are persistent.

The unique texture that yucca provides may not fit into every landscape. But Adam’s needle can be much more than just a textural plant. Its ability to survive in a wide range of soils, climates, and exposures with virtually no maintenance makes it one of the most adaptable plants available.

George Papadelis is the owner of Telly’s Greenhouse in Troy, MI.



George Papadelis



Walters Gardens, Inc.

The bold leaves of the yucca ‘Bright Edge’ combine well with the fine foliage of this ornamental grass (*Pennisetum*).

Yucca, Adam’s Needle

Botanical name:	Yucca (YUK-uh)	Light:	Full to part sun
Plant type:	Evergreen perennial	Soil:	Average, well-drained
Plant size:	18-36 inches tall and wide, depending on variety	Uses:	Specimen, textural contrast, architectural plant. Use in a mixed border with perennials and small shrubs.
Habit:	Clumping crown	Remarks:	Drought tolerant plant. Soil must be well-drained in both summer and winter. Good winter interest as leaves become tinged with a rosy pink. Leaves are sharp; use caution with children in the area.
Hardiness:	Zone 4/5		
Flower color:	Creamy white		
Flower size:	1-2 inches long, bell-like; flower stalk extends a few feet above the foliage		
Bloom period:	Summer		
Leaf color:	Green, yellow-green variegation, blue-green		
Leaf size:	Up to 24 inches long, 1 to 1-1/2 inches wide		