Plant of the Month: January

Scientific Name: *Agave ovatifolia* ‘Frosty Blue’

Common Name: Whale’s Tongue Agave

Selected by: Executive Director Carlo Balistrieri

January’s plant of the month is a ringer. An easy pick for ANY month, *Agave ovatifolia* ‘Frosty Blue’ is especially spectacular in the grey days of winter when its startling smoky-blue foliage reflects the colors of the sky. Its dark mahogany teeth and terminal spines hint at danger, and the combination of leaf and adornment excites everyone who sees it. The ‘bud prints’ on unfurled leaves add interest to an already architectural plant that creates a presence everywhere it’s used.

‘Frosty Blue’ is a stunning foil for many flower colors and it IS the show when interest in the rest of the garden is waning. Commonly called the ‘Whale’s Tongue Agave,’ *A. ovatifolia* is so named for the resemblance of its broad cupped leaves to, naturally, a whale’s tongue. It has the potential to create a 3-4 foot tall by 4-6 feet wide rosette, so plant it in a prime location with plenty of room. Like most Agave, it will grow for many years before flowering, then go out in a blaze of glory. Thankfully, most ‘pup’ or produce small plants around their base before they die. These genetically identical plants can be replanted around the garden and will mature much faster than plants grown from seed.

Our specimens are the hands-down focal point of our green roof, where some are approaching bushel-basket size. Seeing them up off the ground is even more impressive then encountering them in the garden. *Agave ovatifolia* ‘Frosty Blue’ is hardy to at least zone 7B and equally at home in a well-drained spot in the garden, or a good-sized container. Those outside of its tolerance for winter will be amply rewarded by providing it with space indoors until the season allows it to take its place in potted displays.

*Agave ovatifolia* is something of a paradox. It’s a succulent—but appreciates supplemental water when it’s dry and will grow faster if regularly irrigated. Like its brethren, it is a high light lover—but blazing sun in areas where the heat of summer does not abate should be avoided.

One word of caution: Agaves are addictive. Success with one will lead to others. Interest in their use in home gardens is growing fast and they are becoming increasingly available. There are roughly 200 species and nearly 50 subspecies/varieties…and this is before you get to cultivars. They are ALL desirable and exceptionally collectible. Make room…and watch those spines!