

Mezcales

Geographical distribution

Although primarily adapted to arid climates, maguey have a wide distribution. They live in thickets, pastures, pine and oak forests, and dry and humid forests. Some species grow on rocky outcrops with little soil. The mescal maguey are distributed from Sonora to Chiapas and from Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas to the Yucatan Peninsula.



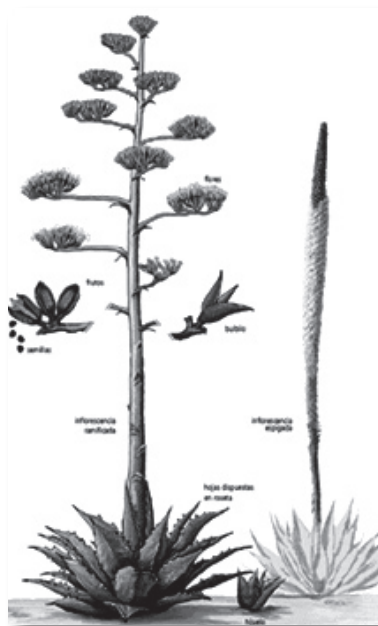
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Mezcales

Natural history

Our ancestors named these plants *metl* or *mexcametl* (Nahuatl), *tocamba* (Purépecha) and *guada* (Otomi), and they are sources of food, drink, fiber, medicine and construction materials. The use for which they are most famous is the production of alcoholic drinks "aquamiel" (*neutli*) the fermented "pulque" (*octli*), and the distilled mezcal (mezcal, tequila and bacanora). The Spanish named them maguey, a word adopted in their passage through the West Indies (the group of islands in the Caribbean and the Atlantic Ocean) in the sixteenth century. *Agave* -from the Greek "admirable" or "noble"- would become its scientific name, coined by the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus in his *Species Plantarum* in 1753.

The maguey can live for between five and seventy years, depending on species, before producing hundreds of flowers that provide nectar to insects, birds and bats in exchange for pollen from other individuals of their species. Most of the maguey develop flowers on branches, others in an inflorescence consisting of a main elongated axis



called a spike, quite or calehual (from nahuatl *quiōtl* = stem, bud). The fertilized flowers, known as hualumbos, produce seeds that are dispersed by wind and rain. After flowering and sexual reproduction, the maguey dies. The seeds inherit and mix the genes inherited from the mother plant and the plant which provided the pollen. Agaves have an alternative form of reproduction, carried out through bulbils and tillers. The former are those that develop from a bud, while the latter are the most vigorous shoots which grow in the main body of the plant. Both bulbils and tillers are genetically identical to the plant that produced them, i.e. they are clones.

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