

Sansevieria trifasciata Hort. ex D. Prain
(*Sansevieria laurentii*)

Snake Plant

Other Common Names: Bowstring Hemp, Devil's Tongue, Good Luck Plant, Lucky Plant, Mother-In-Law's-Tongue, Snake Sansevieria.

Family: Agavaceae (placed by some in the Liliaceae).

Cold Hardiness: This subtropical to tropical plant is cold tolerant only in extreme southern portions of our region, USDA zones 10(9b) to 11.

Foliage: Acaulescent clumps of sessile, stiff, upright, fibrous, plastic-textured succulent, undulating sword-shaped linear-lanceolate leaves; leaves can reach 3N to 5N in length; typically leaves are green to gray-green with some extent of mottled, blotched, banded, or vertical striped variegation in various shades of green, white, or yellow; margins are entire and tips acuminate; glossy; fibrous.

Flower: Although flowering is infrequent, particularly as an interiorscape plant, the fragrant greenish white to white flowers can be attractive; the perfect individual flowers are narrow, tubular, and $\frac{5}{8}$ O to $1\frac{1}{8}$ O long and are borne on loose open 10O to 30O long raceme-like leafless scapes; flowers have six stamens and a superior three-celled ovary, each cell containing a single ovule; when in flower, the species' kinship to *Agave spp.* is most apparent; bloom occurs throughout the year in the tropics, but is most common in summer in the subtropics.

Fruit: The fruit is botanically an orange to orange-red, globose, $\frac{1}{4}$ O to $\frac{3}{8}$ O diameter, one to three-seeded berry; not ornamental; deadhead spend flowers.

Stem / Bark: Stems — leaves originate from small one to six-leaved rosettes on rhizomatous stems; Buds — buried deep within the rosette of leaves underground; Bark — not applicable.

Habit: Technically *S. trifasciata* is an evergreen herbaceous perennial, but this 2N to 5N tall plant forms shrub-like clumps of stiffly upright undulating sword-shaped leaves that more closely resemble a succulent or cacti than a garden perennial; plants are pleasantly coarse textured.

Cultural Requirements: Snake Plant is a highly versatile species surviving in soils with a wide range of pH, fertility and textures as long as they are not consistently poorly drained; as with most succulent-like plants they possess excellent drought tolerance and tolerance to soil and foliar salt exposure is also high; light exposure can range from full sun to dense shade; plant appearance benefits from periodic removal of dilapidated leaves; the light-colored variegated forms may bleach in intense sun.

Pathological Problems: Root / crown rots in wet soils; spider mites, thrips, and various chewing insects can inflict damage; leaves are long-lived so herbivore damage or foliar vandalism are long term aesthetic problems.

Ornamental Assets: Snake Plant offers a strong vertical presence, coupled with outstanding tolerance to drought, low irradiance levels, and soil and foliar salts; variegated forms provide color for dry dense shade areas.

Limitations & Liabilities: The unusual form of this plant can be difficult to work into conventional landscapes; limited cold tolerance is the plant's primary limitation; most cultivars are slow growers; the plant is reportedly **poisonous**.

Landscape Utilization: Year-round outdoor use in our region is restricted to areas immediately adjacent to the Gulf Coast or deep South Texas; outdoors it is typically utilized as an accent, foundation plant or in mass plantings; dwarf forms will work in subtropical rock gardens; further north *Sansevieria spp.* are utilized in interiorscapes, patio containers, or roof-top gardens; *Sansevieria spp.* are favorites for coastal landscapes in tropical regions; whole plants, leaves, and flowers are

used for arrangements in the floral industry.

Other Comments: Mother-In-Law's-Tongue is a virtually indestructible houseplant, making it perfect for those with brown thumbs; this species is perhaps one of the most widely recognized plants by nonprofessionals as it inhabits almost every office building and many homes; my bias coming from a temperate climate is that after observing this species for so long as an interiorscape plant, it tends to look out of character in most conventional landscapes; the tough fibers in the leaves are extracted in some tropical countries for use as a fiber crop; the genus is named in honor of an 18th century Italian prince Raimond de Sangro of Sansevierio; the specific epithet "trifasciata" means in bundles of three, in reference to the flowers.

Native Habitat: South Africa; it is widely utilized in tropical climates and sometimes escapes cultivation.

Related Taxa: Several cultivars are more common in the trade than the species type; perhaps the most widespread is *Sansevieria trifasciata* 'Laurentii' (Gold-Banded Sansevieria or Gold-Striped Sansevieria) which has wide yellow variegated margins on the leaves; *Sansevieria trifasciata* 'Hahnii' (Bird's Nest Sansevieria) is a common 60 to 80 tall dwarf form used in communal potted plant arrangements and as a small groundcover.

References: Broschat and Meerow, 1999; Dehgan, 1998; Friend, 1942; Gilman and Black, 1999; Graf, 1992; Kriegel, 1991; Odenwald and Turner, 1996; Rauch and Weissich, 2000; Riffle, 1998; Watkins and Sheehan, 1975; Whistler, 2000.

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