**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 3\(\text{ to } 5\)\(\text{N}\) 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 \(\text{O}\) to 1\(\text{O}\) long and are borne on loose open 10\(\text{O}\) to 30\(\text{O}\) long raceme-like leafless scapes; flowers have six stamen 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, \(\frac{1}{4}\)\(\text{O}\) to \%\(\text{O}\) diameter, one to three-seeded berry; not ornamental; deadhead spent 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 2\(\text{N}\) to 5\(\text{N}\) 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 Sanseviero; 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 6Oto 8O tall dwarf form used in communal potted plant arrangements and as a small groundcover.