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THE YUCCA OF SEQUOIA

This is the season when the foothills on the roads to Giant Forest, Sequoia National Park, are made glorious by the flowering of the Yucca.

This species of Yucca has been scientifically described as *Yucca whipplei* by Dr. Torrey; its folk name is Spanish Dagger, Lily of the Desert or Our Lord's Candle.

The Yuccas belong to the Lily Family and are the largest of that species in California. Their spires of white blooms may in June be seen for miles in the park foothills, standing like sentinels of purity above the chapparal. Individual plants have been known to contain as many as 800 blossoms which last for some time.

The *Yucca whipplei* is one of those plants which depends upon a special insect for pollination and perpetuation of the species. This insect is a moth (*Pronuba maculata*) and but for this moth the Yucca would soon be extinct. There is another Yucca moth (*Prodaxus cinereus*) that depends on the Yucca for food but which does not pollinize the plants; the "Prodaxus" moth therefore depends for life upon the labors of the "Pronuba" moth.

There seems to be no reliable record of the age at which the Yucca first blooms or the frequency of its blooming, but it is believed to bloom at the eighth year.

The California Indians made use of the leaves of the Yucca; small strips served as strings to hang meat to dry; the fiber was woven into coarse cloth and moccasins or braided into ropes and cords.

This species of Yucca is found on the coastward slopes of the San Bernadino and Southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. Tulare and Fresno Counties seem to be its northern limit. Dr. W. L. Jepson reports the northernmost plant on the Middle Fork of the Kings River, a little below Tehipite Valley; but State Game Warden S. L. N. Ellis reports it as far north as the mouth of Boulder Creek and in the canyons of the Merced River southeast from Anderson Valley in Mariposa County. From observations made in the Sequoia National Park for 25 years past it appears that the Yucca tends to spread northward. As a zonal plant it is characteristic of the upper altitudes of the Lower Sonora Zone, but in the park, under favoring conditions of sun and soil, the Yucca is found growing in small numbers well into the Upper Sonora Zone. Plants have been found at altitude of 6500 feet and are abundant at Colony Mill at 5500 feet.

Nowhere in California are the Yuccas more abundant or in such fine bloom as around Ash Mountain in the Sequoia National Park. Here there is a veritable grove of Yuccas on the southern limestone slopes along the Middle Fork of the Kaweah River. This grove is easily reached by automobile from Three Rivers, con-

tains over 300 acres of land and approximately 5000 Yuccas, many of which attain a height of over 18 feet. The rapid increase is due to protection from forest fires. Three times the Ash Mountain grove of Yuccas has been threatened but each time rangers have promptly fought the fires and saved the Yuccas.

To those who have never seen the Yuccas at their best, a trip to the Ash Mountain grove during June will be well worth while. The Yuccas are now preserved not only within the park but also on private lands outside the park. Only within the last year has the scenic value of these stately plants become apparent to the people of California. At the instance of the Hill & Mountain Club, Tulare County has passed an ordinance forbidding the destruction of the Yuccas which now remain for days or weeks a glory of the foothills; whereas in past years most of the blooms fell to the thoughtless motorists who carried them to the valley where they wilted in an hour or two.

The various species of the Yuccas have been known to the people of the southern United States for the past sixty years and much has been deservedly said in their praise, but the species above mentioned seem to have been practically ignored until very recently, and now practically all counties in the state of California, where the plants are found growing, have passed ordinances for their protection. This species of Yucca has sprung into popularity, which is growing rapidly and steadily each day.