

Sansevieria trifasciata

by Lisa Marie Gee

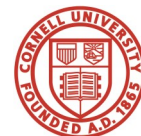
Looking for a houseplant that needs little care? Sansevieria might just be the plant for you. Common names are snake plant, mother-in-law's tongue, bowstring hemp or devil's tongue. It is a tender evergreen perennial and a relative of asparagus (family of Asparagaceae). The plant is native to tropical West Africa from east of Nigeria to the Congo, Madagascar and southern Asia. It's named after Prince Sansevero that was from Naples. There are approximately 70 varieties of this genus with about 15 grown commercially. It has been in cultivation for over 250 years and grown in the US foliage trade since the 1920's. There are two types which are the ones with tall upright leaves or a bird nest type. The plant was prized for the useful fibers obtained from its leaves to make ropes and baskets in Africa as well as for medicinal qualities and for being a protective charm against bewitchment. In China they believed when kept by the entrances of homes it would circulate the eight virtues through the home. The eight virtues are long life, prosperity, intelligence, beauty, art, poetry, health and strength. It has also been proven to remove formaldehyde and benzene from the air. Sansevieria have stiff, upright, glossy spear-like leaves that can range from 8 inches to 12 feet in height depending on the variety. Leaves can be green banded, green banded with a yellow border or white and green. This plant can have flowers that are clustered on a slender stalk, colored greenish-white, and are fragrant. Flowering may happen when the plant is mildly



stressed. Propagation is generally done by division of the plant or cuttings. For cuttings you would cut 3- inch lengths of a leaf and then place 1/3rd of the cut end in damp sand. Note though that by using the cutting technique the yellow banding or marginal stripes may not be on the new plant. Division is by far the easier of the two to do and can be done when you repot the plant. Division will also make sure your plant stays with the colors it is.

This is a good houseplant for beginners as it will tolerate the most unsuitable growing conditions, abuse and neglect. Sansevieria can do well in very bright light to almost dark light with some direct sun. Temperatures between 55-85 degrees Fahrenheit promote a good growing environment but avoid prolonged temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit as it could damage the plant. The soil should be loose and well-drained. Watering should be done when the soil is dry and, in the winter, monthly watering is all that is needed.

Note that too much water will be detrimental to the plant and kill it. Fertilizing with mild cactus fertilizer during the growing season is all that is needed. There are not too many pest problems but mealybugs and spider mites can occur. 🍷



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21 South Grove Street
East Aurora, NY 14052

