

SNAKE PLANTS IN THE GARDEN

By Ralph E. Mitchell

Snake plants or *Sansevieria*, are common landscape and container plants that are members of the agave family. Originally from Africa, Arabia and India, snake plants are now seen in indoor planters, in dish gardens and even in planting beds. Grown in Florida as an important foliage plant since the 1920's, these plants are very adaptable from sun to shade. While the most common *Sansevieria* is called the snake plant or *Sansevieria trifasciata*, there are many species and cultivars available to the home gardener.

Sansevieria trifasciata is the source of many commercially important cultivars. Cultivars are selected mutations that have some outstanding or unique feature that growers find and cultivate. Many of these sports or mutations are available at garden centers and internet sites. If you are a plant collector, *Sansevieria* has a wide range of colors and shapes to choose from. A type of snake plant that makes a great groundcover is one called the dwarf snake plant or Bird's Nest *Sansevieria*. This plant forms a tight vase-like rosette of leaves that only gets six-inches tall. The leaves are dark green with light green irregular bands. Multiple side shoots will develop into a tight groundcover over time. Like all *Sansevieria*, this cultivar is drought tolerant and even tolerates moderate amounts of salt spray. It makes a great subject in a desert or rock garden. Make sure that the site is well drained to prevent root rots. There is also a golden and silver version of this called, respectively, 'Golden Hahnii' and 'Silver Hahnii'.

Another very popular variety is one called 'Laurentii' or the gold band *Sansevieria*. This upright plant has a yellow leaf margin. There is also a compact version which has shorter leaves with darker green zones between the gold bands called 'Futura'. 'Moonshine' is an additional cultivar of *S. trifasciata* with silvery,

gray-green foliage when grown in sunny locations. When grown in a shady location, 'Moonshine' (also known as 'Moonglow'), will have darker leaves. Needless to say, there are a lot of varieties to pick from!

There is one species of *Sansevieria* to note known as Bowstring Hemp (*Sansevieria hyacinthoides*) which is an invasive variety. Sometimes found in disturbed wild land areas, this snake plant is not a desirable specimen for cultivation.



A variegated cultivar of *Sansevieria trifasciata*.
Wikipedia/The Free Encyclopedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

Snake plants can be propagated by division of large clumps or leaf cuttings. Cuttings from dwarf varieties should be entire leaves while taller types can be cut into four to eight inch sections. Cuttings should be stuck about one inch into the potting medium for best results.

Keep in mind that Sansevieria cuttings, if set upside down – easy to do if you forget which side is up - will not root. Cuttings produce one to five plantlets in about six weeks. Remove the plantlets when large enough into individual pots.

Some snake plants do not come true from cuttings and are best propagated by division of plant clumps.

Consider snake plants in your landscape, patio or interiorscape. Their variety in size, shape and color coupled with drought tolerance and site adaptability will make the Sanservieria a welcome addition to your plant collection.

For more information on all types of ornamental plants, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** every Thursday 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) every Thursday 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 1st Saturday of month.
- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3rd Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Henley, R.W., Chase, A. R. & Osborne, L. S. Sanservieria Production Guide. CFREC - University of Florida, IFAS.

Gilman, E.F. (1999) Sansevieria trifasciata 'Hahnii'. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.

Sansevieria hyacinthoides - Bowstring Hemp. (2005) UF Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants.