



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

“Red Yucca” *Hesperaloe parviflora* (That grassy thing that isn’t grass and blooms nice) (November 12, 2022) by William Keen, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

We have all been there. You see an attractive-looking plant with reddish-pink flowers—what is it? Is it some kind of ornamental grass? No... not with showy red blooms like that. Well, it must be a succulent for it to be thriving amongst all that rock in the business drive-throughs. Actually, it’s a red yucca, or *Hesperaloe parviflora*, and has grown very popular in the Tulare-Kings Counties area as a backbone plant in a xeriscape or drought tolerant garden.

Hesperaloes are members of the *Asparagaceae* family of plants, and are sometimes referred to as false yuccas. This is because they retain some of the growth and cultural characteristics of yuccas, while having a shape and growth habit that more closely resembles that of an aloe or member of the grass family. They are native to the deserts of western Texas and northeastern Mexico.

In the landscape, red yuccas can be a welcome substitute for ornamental grasses, as they do not become invasive or spread, tend to do well with much less water once established, and have the added benefit of colorful blooms. You might find them in several low water use or xeriscape plantings surrounded by decorative rocks, boulders, and nonorganic ground coverings like decomposed granite.



Hesperaloe is well adapted to the extra heat retention that comes with all the weed reducing, low-maintenance-rock ground coverings out there. It can even thrive in hot patio pots where other plants burn out. Once well-established in the ground, they can do quite well with no additional irrigation. The WUCOLS database (<https://ccuh.ucdavis.edu/>) lists them as a low water use plant for the San Joaquin valley. Sandy well-drained soils and full sun locations are best, as they are well adapted to hot arid summers in desert regions. Some shade is okay for them, although they will bloom less. Small abundant pink flowers on long stalks are common, although there are other cultivars available that have deep red or brilliant soft yellow flowers. Pollinators love to seek out these blooms in summer.

Planting *Hesperaloes* is very easy. They like dry, sandy, well-drained and even nutrient poor areas. Dig a hole as deep as the root ball of your plant and at least one and a half times as wide. Water the plant thoroughly before removing from its pot, gently loosening any roots on the outside that have circled the pot. Fill the planting hole with water three times, allowing it to drain in between. This ensures that the moisture you added at planting does not immediately drain and dry into the surrounding soil. Plant your *Hesperaloe* at ground level--or slightly above ground level if you are adding a layer of mulch or rock. Planting in a “bowl” or lower than ground level runs the risk of the crown of the plant staying too wet and rotting when watered.

Once planted, allow your *Hesperaloe* to dry out completely (5-6“down) between waterings for the first summer. Once established, it can tough out droughty periods on its own or welcome any additional water you throw its way--provided it never stays totally wet for long periods. Fall or spring planting allows you to be lazier with checking its moisture level. Low water use, drought tolerant, and xeriscape are not synonymous with zero water. It rains in the desert, right? At least once a month would be good for blooms and healthy growth--but if you occasionally forget, your *Hesperaloe* will more than likely forgive you and still be there.

If you love this plant and want more, *Hesperaloe* is easily propagated by either dividing the root ball or gathering seeds from spent flowers. While it can be divided any time of the year, it is easier and more successful outside of the hot summer months. Seed propagation is also straight forward. Use a well-drained cactus mix or add up to 50% sand, perlite, or decomposed granite to an existing sterile potting soil mix. The seeds need no pretreatment and will germinate under a light covering of soil (1/4” inch) within 1-3 months with occasional watering. Be patient with your seedlings, as it will take a few years to grow from seed to a blooming size.

Perhaps you’d like to replace your lawn with a new drought-tolerant landscape, or maybe you would like a new addition to your established landscape. Or perhaps you have an area of your yard that you’ve had trouble establishing plants in because of its location. No matter which, red yuccas are attractive, easy-to-care-for plants for a dry, sunny area. Enjoy, and be the envy of your neighbors!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions:

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Ace Hardware, Visalia - 1st Sat./every month, 10 am-1 pm
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Hofman's Nursery, Hanford – 3rd Sat./every month, 10 am-1 pm
Nov. 19, 11 am – 12 pm, Wreath-Making Class, Tulare City Library, Signup 685-4503

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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