



For the Love of Aloes

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Aloes make beautiful additions to gardens due to their bold architectural forms, vibrantly colored flowers, and ability to attract hummingbirds. They offer some of the best colors for Arizona gardens with their impressive and long-lasting flowers shown during late winter and spring.

Aloes are popular plants with over 500 species identified and four species known for medicinal properties. Unlike agaves which are New World plants, aloes are Old World plants originating in Africa. The center of diversity for aloes is South Africa, which hosts more than 120 species. The range of sizes of the species varies widely from small grass-like aloes to large tree-like aloes. In Africa, aloes are pollinated by sunbirds, while in the Americas, they are pollinated by hummingbirds.

Aloes have fleshy spiny leaves arranged in rosettes and flowers clustered in groups on candle-like or cone-shaped stalks. The flowers are tubular and come in many colors. Fruits are dry capsules containing black seeds.

Aloes require little care but do best with good drainage and plenty of sunlight. Fertilize only lightly in mid-spring and late summer. Pests are rarely a problem. Propagate aloes by using seeds or offsets produced at the base of the plants. They are long-lived plants, especially larger species.

Aloes may be confused with agaves. Differences in the leaf margin and marginal teeth make a clear vegetative distinction between the two. In agaves, the marginal teeth are always of a different and distinct tissue with a fine line of demarcation. In aloes, there is no such border; what look like teeth on closer examination are just elongations of the leaf. In all agaves, the vascular system elongates through the leaf, creating fibers that run the entire length of the leaf. Aloe leaves are gelatinous in the interior, never with the fibers present in agaves.



Some recommended aloes for Arizona landscapes include:

Aloe barbadensis – Medicinal Aloe

Aloe dawei – Dawe's Aloe

Aloe ferox – Cape Aloe or Tree Aloe

Aloe maculata (*A. saponaria*) – Soap Aloe, Zebra Aloe

Aloe marlothii – Flat-Flowered Aloe

Aloe striata – Coral Aloe

Aloe variegata – Partridge Breast Aloe

Aloe x hybrid – Blue Elf Aloe