



Yucca baccata with red flowers

1: Overview of *Yucca baccata* plant with about nine stems. Tall plants in the background are *Yucca torreyi*. Trail in the far background is ascending to Anthony Gap Natural Cave.

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Flora of North America (Hess & Robbins 2002) described tepals (sepals + petals) of all *Yucca* species as “whitish to cream or tinged slightly with green or purple”. Overall, *Yucca* flowers are hardly spectacular, at least for those wanting a blast of color. That said, outer sepal color, i.e. color of the outside of flower buds, can be more vibrant in a few *Yucca* plants.

I stumbled upon the pictured plant (Figs. 1–4) at Anthony Gap, south of O’Hara Road, aka NM 404, along the Sierra Vista Trail, by the small parking area that is inside the first gate. The plant was not far south of the second gate where the gravel road becomes much rougher, approximately halfway between NM 404 and the Texas state line. I believe

this is *Yucca baccata* Torrey because the plant is highly branched with each shoot having a very short or no visible trunk (Fig. 1) and the fibrous leaf margins are curly (Fig. 2). The only other *Yucca* at this locale is *Yucca torreyi* Shafer (synonym: *Yucca treculeana* Carrière), which is a much taller plant with fibrous leaf margins that are straight. Both species have succulent baccate fruits that were not present in early April. However, confounding identification, Webber (1953) stated that where these two species co-occur, “apparent hybrids are quite common”.

Hess & Robbins (2002) described tepals of *Yucca baccata* as “usually cream-colored, occasionally tinged with purple”. This plant at Anthony Gap



2: Note curly fibers on edge of leaves and an inflorescence just barely taller than leaves.



had cream colored inner tepals, but the dark wine red outer tepal color made this plant particularly attractive. Within a week, all the flowers had faded, and this simply looked like any other raggedy *Yucca*. At some juncture, I shall have to go back in summer or fall to collect seeds, although this won't guarantee that flower color of its offspring will be nearly as spectacular.

The only literature I've seen reporting similar colored tepals in the genus is a seed catalogue, in which Alan Bradshaw (2022) described a population of *Yucca glauca* Nutt. in far northwestern Oklahoma as, "Many individual plants displayed deep pink-maroon sepals much darker than usual". *Yucca glauca* is the only member of the genus native to Canada (Hulbert 2001) and even tiny seedlings from this selection with pink-maroon sepals

3: Inflorescence.



4: Cream-colored open flower.

survive winters unprotected outdoors in Ontario. So, in a few years, ask me what color their flowers are, especially compared with the spectacular plant of *Y. baccata* at Anthony Gap.

Note: All photos are of the same plant of *Yucca baccata* along the Sierra Vista Trail at Anthony Gap in New Mexico. All photos taken virtually simultaneously on 5 April 2023.

Literature cited:

- Bradshaw, A.D. 2022. *AlPlains seed catalogue*. www.alplains.com.
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- Hulbert, D., 2001. Status of soapweed (*Yucca glauca*) in Alberta. In *Alberta Wildlife Status Report No. 35*. Michaud, I.M.G., ed. Alberta Environmental Protection, Alberta Environment, and Alberta Conservation Association.
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