

Agave fourcroydes

[Synonyms : *Agave sullivanii*]

HENEQUEN is a succulent perennial. Native to Yucatan in Mexico it has yellowish-green flowers.

It is also known as Agave, Henequen agave, Mexican sisal, Sisal, Sisal hemp, Yucatan hemp, and Yucatan sisal.

Fourcroydes commemorates a French chemist and naturalist, Antoine François de Fourcroy (1755-1809) who in 1784 was appointed a professor at the *Jardin du Roi* and, with the French scientist Michel Augustin Thouret (1748-1809), examined some of the well-preserved mortal remains when many were being moved from the cemetery of the St. Innocents in Paris to the Catacombs. They discovered that the fatty substances (adipocere), which had formed in the damp airless environment, had similar physical and chemical properties to those of soap. He isolated urea and, with the French chemist Nicolas-Louis Vauquelin (1763-1829), also discovered iridium. Fourcroy collaborated with his peers too, including the French chemist Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743-1794), on a new system of chemical nomenclature. During the Napoleonic Revolution he was minister of public instruction from 1802 to 1808 and was involved in establishing primary and secondary educational reforms that embraced scientific studies. His involvement in the Revolutionary régime led to accusations that he contributed to Lavoisier's death but some authorities have found evidence that he had actually made attempts to prevent that execution. He was a founder of *Annales de Chimie* still respected today, and his published works were numerous (both alone and jointly with colleagues) and some authorities point particularly to one in collaboration on entomology, and another entitled *Principles de chimie*.

This species earned the name Sisal because it was originally exported in 1839 from the port of Sisal.

Henequen's leaf fibre is coarser than that of sisal (*Agave sisalana*) and is used for binder twine (particularly for harvesting grain crops) and for guy ropes and rope generally. However it has a serious practical drawback for some applications apart from its coarseness and that is that it swells when wet. The cake left after the fibre has been extracted is used for paper pulp.

Henequen is cultivated as both a hedging and ornamental plant.