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Agave sisalana

[Synonyms : *Agave rigida*, *Agave rigida* var. *sisalana*]

SISAL is a succulent perennial. Native to eastern Mexico it has large unpleasant smelling, yellowish-green flowers.

It is also known as *Agáva sisalová* (Slovak), *Agáve sisalová* (Czech), Bahama hemp, Hemp, *Sisalagaave* (Finnish), Sisal agave, *Sisalagave* (German, Swedish), Sisal hemp, and Yaxci.

Although the seed rarely matures outside Middle America (or the Kenyan highlands in Africa) the plant also produces 1,500-2,000 tiny bulbs on the ends of its runners when the rest of the plant has died after flowering.

The leaves are cut from the base of the rosette and crushed and de-pulped by machine to obtain the fibre. This is long (as much as 3 ft.) very coarse, and very strong although not unusually durable.

Sisalana means 'of or from the port of Sisal on the Mexican coast'.

This is the plant from which 'true' sisal is obtained. The harsh fibre extracted from the leaves swells when wet (a disadvantage in some circumstances). It is used commercially today for all kinds of cordage and twine, not least for making hammocks and matting.

Sisal wax has also been used as an ingredient in the manufacture of polishes and carbon paper.

The plant's introduction to Hawaii in 1893 for commercial cultivation for fibre ultimately proved uneconomic in the face of competition from Central America where labour costs were less.

The fermented sap from the flowering stem is used locally to make alcoholic drinks.