

Longwood Gardens' century plant blooms for first time in more than two decades

The flowered stalk emerged from the succulent during the winter and now stands more than 30 feet tall, poking out of a greenhouse roof.



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Longwood Garden's *Agave americana*, or century plant, is in bloom for the first time in 22 years. The misleadingly named century plant, also known as *Agave americana*, is at peak bloom for the first time in 22 years at Longwood Gardens.

Century plants bloom once every 10 to 25 years, though previously it was believed they only flowered once every 100 years – thus their name. The perennial succulent can be found in Longwood's Silver Garden greenhouse, which houses a number of other succulents at the public botanical gardens located mostly in East Marlborough, Chester County.

Though it's currently at peak bloom, meaning it looks its best right now, the flower should stick around until October, horticulturalists predict.

"This is a spectacular bloom and certainly an unusual one for our region. Though a century plant is a staple in our Silver Garden, it might be another 20 years before the next one blooms," Longwood spokesperson Jourdan Cole said.

The staff at the Longwood Gardens first saw signs during the winter that the century plant's bloom was imminent. The plant had a growth spurt back in February with a single stalk sprouting upwards from its bushy leaves near the ground. That stem resembled an asparagus, and it grew 5-6 inches each day that month.

Longwood workers had to remove a pane of glass from the conservatory roof back in March to allow the century plant to grow taller, and it now stands over 30 feet tall, looming high above the greenhouse. The blooms are green and yellow clusters that look similar to broccoli.



PROVIDED IMAGE/LONGWOOD GARDENS/HANK DAVIS

Workers at Longwood Gardens had to remove a pane from the conservatory to make room for the plant's rare bloom.

Once it's done blooming, plant's flower head will be removed and dried for use in the Longwood's annual Christmas display. Another century plant will replace this one, restarting the cycle with the potential that plant will bloom in a decade or two.

Previous century plants have bloomed at Longwood Gardens in 1997 and 2007.

Century plants are native to Mexico and the southern United States. Their nectar can be used as a sweetener, and the sweet liquid also can be fermented and distilled to make mezcal, a liquor that can be produced using a number different species of agave plants.



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