This species, only relatively recently described in 1996, is now becoming more generally available in cultivation. Hopefully we will see some large specimens on show benches in the coming years. My plant (Fig. 1) was raised from seed in 2009 by Tina Wardhaugh, so it is relatively slow-growing. My plants till now have been grown in plastic pans but such a handsome architectural plant deserves to be more attractively displayed, so this year, one plant was repotted into a rough glazed pot with an appealing geometric design.

Plants form solitary, non-offsetting rosettes that look like giant sempervivums up to 1.5m across and 1.25m tall at maturity. The bright-green leaves are densely packed, bear prominent bud imprints and are well-armed with lethal reddish-brown terminal spines up to 5cm long, accompanied by prominent hooked marginal teeth and go grey with age. Flowering is unusual in this species as the spike starts to develop one season, growth halts for the winter and development to full flowering resumes the following spring. Few species of Agave flower in this, as yet unexplained, way but the closely-related Agave gentryi and A. parrasana have a similar flowering chronology.

Agave montana in flower has been likened to “a giant artichoke with a gigantic asparagus shoot poking straight up from the heart” (Starr, 2012)! The numerous flowers are long and brilliant yellow.

Agave montana is aptly named as it comes from Mexican mountains where it grows, for example, in Tamaulipas above 2,600m where the habitat is cool in summer and cold in winter, reaching -10°C in most years. It grows on moist mountainsides and plants are routinely covered in mist, drizzly rain, frost and even snow (Starr, 2012). Consequently, plants in cultivation have proved to be frost hardy down to -15°C but for survival at these low temperatures they need to be kept absolutely dry. Coming from such a high altitude, plants are unlikely to perform at their best in very hot dry climates and indeed cool summer temperatures probably suit it best (Starr, 2012). In my experience these plants can take plenty of water during the growing season but require some shading.

LITERATURE: