Century plants in bloom, with their lofty flower spike, grow a couple feet each day and reach more than 20 feet high.

The blooms are amazing to see, if you are lucky enough to come across one. You see, it may take more than a decade until one finally blooms.

The century plant, (Agave americana) has been around for many centuries. It can be found throughout most of Florida and California. It also grows in Southern Texas and Louisiana. American Indians for soap, food, medicine and weapons.

Century plants as seen in Florida landscapes, consist of a tight rosette of stiff, sword-shaped leaves. The twisting leaves are capable of growing up to 6 feet long and 10 inches wide and as a whole will grow quite large with a height of 6 to 8 feet and a spread of up to 10 feet. Stiff spines, located on the tips of the leaves, are very sharp, and should be removed to protect children and pets.

Two varieties of century plants are commonly used in landscapes. The original variety has blue-green foliage and a coarse, upright appearance. The "Marginata," popular in many Central Florida landscapes, has twisted green leaves with bright yellow bands along the leaf margins. The stripes give the plant the appearance of a giant striped ribbon.

Tolerant of heat and drought, century plants are easy to care for. They prefer to be planted in full sun but can easilt adapt to partial shade. Favored for use in rock gardens, they may also be used as a border or accent plant. In a home landscape they, they are not usually planted in mass because of their size. If you have room for more than one, make sure you space them 3 to 5 feet apart.

Century plants will take many years to bloom, but not quite the century as its name implies. On average it takes at least ten years to save enough energy to produce the enormous flower spike. Some however may bloom sooner. The flower spike, often mistaken as a medium-sized tree when fully grown, can reach a a height of 20 feet or more. It grows quickly, sometimes a couple of feet each day, and may need support to stay upright.

When the flower spike reaches its maximum height, it will bloom. The flowers are pale yellow to white in color. Don't blink, because the flower spike grows fast and doesn't last for long.

Although the bloom of the century plant is a natural phenomenon, it is also the sign of demise. The plant expends so much energy producing the bloom that it dies soon after. Nevertheless, when it dies, it will hopefully send out new baby plants from the base.

Century plants can make a dramatic statement in your landscape. They have outstanding ornamental features. For more information on the century plant or any other landscape questions, contact Osceola County Master Gardeners, who are available at 321-697-3000, Mondays to Fridays, from 10am to 2pm.