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Nobel, Park S. REMARKABLE AGAVES AND CACTI. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 166 pp. U.S. \$19.95 paper ISBN: 0-19-508415-2. Acid-free paper.

What can the average person say about cacti or agaves? At the very least he or she would probably agree that cacti and agaves are unusual looking, at times even beautiful, plants that grow in arid climates. Is there anything more to be said? Dr. Nobel, a leading authority on the environmental biology of agaves and cacti, would answer with a resounding yes. With this book he aims to awaken the interest of a diverse audience in these unique plants, their special physiology, and their many commercial uses. He begins in chapter 1 with background information, explaining the classification and evolution of the plants and their basic differences, and presenting a concise description of their ethnobotanical history. In chapters 2 and 3, Nobel expands on the uses of the plants. Agaves are a source for cattle fodder, fibers, poisons, soaps, steroids, fencing and, perhaps unknown to margarita lovers, tequila. Cacti have also provided fencing, medicines and hormones, as well as peyote and other hallucinogens. In chapters 4 through 6, Nobel explains the plants' extraordinary physiology, detailing the process of water and carbon dioxide uptake, which is key to their ecological advantages and agronomic potential. In chapter 7 he discusses the plants' productivity and ways to increase it through biotechnological manipulations. Finally, in chapter 8 Nobel looks to the future, identifying potential industries and products and ways to widen the appeal of agaves and cacti. He also stresses, as he does throughout the book, the need to protect these plants, many of which are threatened.

Nobel designed his book to allow the reader to pick and choose the chapters and topics of interest. The chapters on the physiology of the plants are the most technical, but the explanations are clear and concise. The photographs and figures are a welcomed addition. One minor point of concern is that the index indicates where terms are defined in the book by bolding the page numbers. A separate glossary would have been more useful. Otherwise, this book is highly recommended for public and academic collections.