



Anza-Borrego Just for Kids
Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association
www.abdnha.org

Page 1: Desert Plants



✓ If seen ___ **5 Points**

Where to See it: Barrel Cactus grows on rocky slopes and lower canyons around Borrego Springs. Little Surprise Canyon and Glorietta Canyon are great places to see Barrel Cactus.

Interesting Facts: The spines of a cactus are actually modified leaves. The main part of the plant is the stem.

Did you Know? The spines of a cactus help to shade the green part of the plant from the sun. A barrel cactus will get skinnier when there is little water available and then plump back up when it has absorbed water. These are all adaptations to help it survive.

Many animals eat the barrel cactus or its fruit, including desert bighorn sheep and antelope ground squirrels. It is also an important source of nectar for bees.

DESERT AGAVE

Where to See it: Desert Agave grows on both the rocky slopes and flats around Borrego Springs. There are also many agaves in the vicinity of Yaqui Pass, on the way from Borrego Springs to Tamarisk grove.

Interesting Facts: Sometimes the Agave is called a "century plant" because it takes a really long time for the plant to bloom - up to 20 years! When the stalk finally begins to grow, it can grow very rapidly, up to one foot per day. It can reach a height of 15 feet.

Did you Know? The Agave was an important source of food for native people, who ate the flowers and cooked the leaves and stalks. They also used Agave as a building material and to make footwear.



✓ If seen ___ **5 Points**

OCOTILLO

Where to See it: Ocotillo is a very common plant in the Anza-Borrego Desert. It can be seen on the well drained slopes around Borrego Springs.

Interesting Facts: In some parts of the southwest Ocotillo branches are planted in rows across the ground. Many of these branches will take root and the result is a very dense living fence with sharp spines!

Did you Know? The Ocotillo spreads its roots out in all directions just below the surface to absorb water whenever it rains. The Ocotillo sometimes has no leaves and looks like a dead plant. But it is not dead at all! As soon as there is some rain the branches will be covered in bright green leaves.



✓ If seen ___ **15 Points**

The red tubular flowers are a favorite of hummingbirds, which feed on the nectar.



✓ If seen ___5 Points

BRITTLEBUSH

Where to See it: Brittlebush grows on the rocky slopes, open sandy washes, and canyons west of Borrego Springs.

Interesting Facts: Brittlebush is an important food source for desert bighorn sheep. Brittlebush is a member of the sunflower family.

Did you Know? The leaves of the brittlebush plant have many very small hairs that give it a silvery color. The hairs help to protect the leaves from the heat of the sun and also to trap moisture and prevent the leaves from drying out.



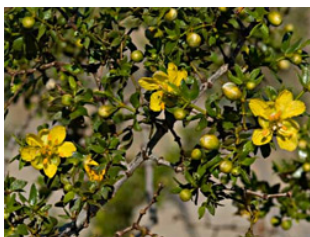
✓ If seen ___5 Points

CHOLLA CACTUS

Where to See it: There are many different kinds of cholla cactus that grow in different locations. Cholla may be seen from the desert floor up to the lower slopes of the mountains.

Interesting Facts: The fruit of the Cholla Cactus is a favorite food of many desert animals.

Did you Know? A Cholla Cactus may look fuzzy, but never touch it! Its spines are extremely sharp and have barbs like fishhooks. It's painful to get stuck by a Cholla. If an animal brushes up against a Cholla Cactus, a part of the stem will break off and stick to the animal's fur. It will eventually fall off, take root, and grow in the new location. This adaptation helps the Cholla to reproduce.



✓ If seen ___15 Points

CREOSOTE BUSH

Where to See it: Creosote Bush is seen throughout the Borrego Valley.

Interesting Facts: Creosote Bush has tiny leaves with a waxy coating that seals in the water and slows water loss. Its bright yellow flowers become fuzzy white seed balls. The seeds are then easily blown around in the wind to new locations, where new plants can start to grow.

Did you Know? Rub a leaf between your fingers and smell the aroma. When it rains in the desert the air is filled with the scent of Creosote Bush.



DESERT FLOWERS

Many people visit the desert to see the beautiful flowers in bloom. The best time to see desert flower is in the springtime. There will be more springtime flowers when the desert gets rainfall over the winter months. Here are some examples of flowers you may see in Anza-Borrego.



Chuparosa



.Fishhook Cactus



Desert Dandelion



Desert Sand Verbena



Beavertail Cactus



Desert Lavender



Dune Primrose



Ocotillo

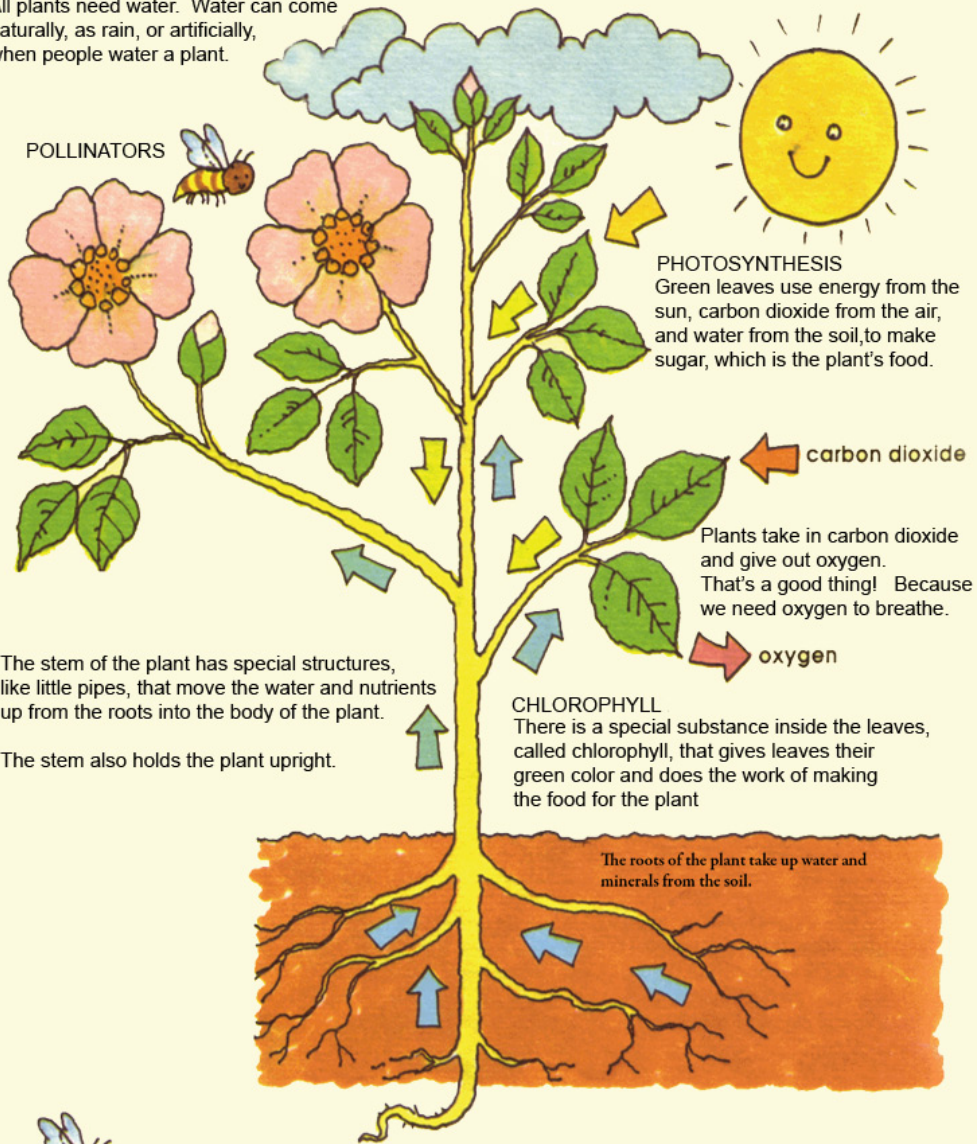


Indigo Bush

WHAT IS AN ADAPTATION? What is an adaptation? An adaptation is something that a plant or animal has developed over thousands of years to help it survive in its environment and compete with other plants or animals. Here's an example: The seeds of some desert plants have a hard coating on them that must be worn off before the seed can grow. In most cases the hard coating will only be worn off as the seed is tumbled around in the sand during a flash flood. This adaptation works because the plant will grow only when there is also enough water to get it started.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY THORNS? Why are there so many thorns? The thorns on desert plants are an adaptation that serves several purposes. First of all, they protect the stem, the main part of the plant, and discourage animals from eating them! But some desert animals eat them anyway. In the case of cactus, the thorns also form a shield around the stem of the plant and give it some shade in the hot desert sun. This is important because it keeps the plant from drying out. Thorns also catch little drops of rain, when they fall, and channel all that water down to the base of the plant.

All plants need water. Water can come naturally, as rain, or artificially, when people water a plant.



POLLINATORS

PHOTOSYNTHESIS
Green leaves use energy from the sun, carbon dioxide from the air, and water from the soil, to make sugar, which is the plant's food.

carbon dioxide

Plants take in carbon dioxide and give out oxygen. That's a good thing! Because we need oxygen to breathe.

oxygen

The stem of the plant has special structures, like little pipes, that move the water and nutrients up from the roots into the body of the plant.

The stem also holds the plant upright.

CHLOROPHYLL
There is a special substance inside the leaves, called chlorophyll, that gives leaves their green color and does the work of making the food for the plant

The roots of the plant take up water and minerals from the soil.

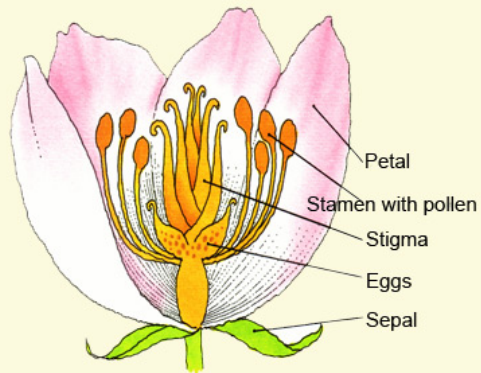


POLLINATORS ARE IMPORTANT!

The flowers of a plant have many special parts that allow the plant to reproduce itself.

But none of that would happen without bees, hummingbirds, bats, butterflies, and other insects.

When pollinators collect the sweet nectar from a flower, they move the pollen from flower to flower and plant to plant. This is necessary for the plant to create the fruit and seeds that make reproduction possible.



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