

# DESERT PLANTS

## Part of Arizona's diverse ecosystem

Arizona is home to a diverse ecosystem of unique desert plants. The intense heat and lack of rain has caused many of the trees, cacti, and bushes to adapt to the harsh climate. Although our landscape can be less green than other parts of the world, Arizona plants have many different uses for humans. Our plants have provided us with food, medicine, and tools. Many of these plants can be found around your neighborhood, park, and community! Let's go explore!



### Mesquite Trees

These hardy trees can be found in the deserts of the United States and Mexico. Mesquites will flower small yellow blooms in the spring and summer and grow small brown pods. The seeds inside these pods can be ground into a fine flour that can be used for baking. Native American tribes have used the mesquite leaves as a natural medication to soothe toothaches, burns, sores, and chapped skin.



### Mesquite Pods

Mesquite flour is one of the earliest foods used in prehistoric Southwest. Native American tribes in have used mesquite pods to mix into water for a sweet drink and flour for flat bread. These pods have been important to the Tohono O'odham lunar calendar. During the summer, in early June, the Tohono O'odham recognize U'us Wihogdag Masad, "Mesquite Bean Harvest Moon".



### Palo Verde Trees

Green bark and yellow blooms are common traits of Palo Verde trees. The yellow flowers bloom in the spring and early summer. These flowers are sweet and edible. The tree bark and wood can be used in making tools. The seed pods that the Palo Verde tree grows have also been used as flour by grinding the seeds.



For more learning and educational activities, visit the [Arizona History Digital Hub](https://azhs.org) at [azhs.org](https://azhs.org).

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Arizona History Museum, Downtown History Museum and Fort Lowell Museum, Tucson  
Sanguinetti House Museum & Gardens, Yuma



## Creosote Bush

The creosote bush is commonly found in the Sonoran Desert. This bush is known for the smell it produces, especially when wet. This smell is similar to rain. This plant has been used for multiple purposes. You can dry the leaves of the plant to create an herbal tea. The leaves have also been used as medicine in many Native American communities. Sores, wounds, snake bites, and cramps have been treated by medicinal use of this plant. You can also use the wood of the bush for a fire or lumber to build.

# DESERT ART ACTIVITIES

Creating art is a fun activity that anyone can do. You can make art with paint, coloring pencils, photography, clay, and even desert plants!

## Desert Plants Collage

Go on a nature walk around your neighborhood, community, park, or mountain trails to collect desert leaves, branches, seeds, pods, and flowers. Look for desert plants that you just learned about. You can use the flowers, pods, seeds, leaves, or sticks from these plants to make a collage. A collage is a piece of art that uses different materials to create something new.



### MATERIALS NEEDED

Leaves, sticks, seeds, pods, flowers, paper, and glue

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pick a construction paper that is your favorite color.
2. Brainstorm what design you will create with your collection of plants.
3. Use glue to tack down the desert plants you collected to your construction paper.
4. Let your collage dry for an hour.
5. Display your beautiful new collage.

## Creosote Shower Bundle

When creosote leaves get wet they create the smell of desert rains. You can make a shower bundle that can be placed in a shower to make a calming smell.



### MATERIALS NEEDED

Creosote twigs, floral wire or string, scissors

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Go on a nature walk around your neighborhood, apartment community, park, or nature trail and find a creosote bush and clip small twigs using your scissors.
2. Bunch the twigs together until they make a bunch that is around 4-5 inches long.
3. Use your floral wire or string, wrap the twigs together.
4. Once you are finished, place your creosote bundle in the shower.
5. Let the steam from the shower release the rainy smells from the bundle.



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