

Carlsbad Caverns

National Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

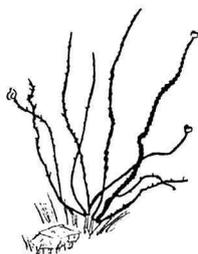
NATIVE PLANTS OF THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT



LECHUGUILLA: (*Agave*) One of the main indicator species of the Chihuahuan Desert, the largest desert in North America, though most lies in Mexico. It is a “century plant” which grows for 15-20 years, flowers, then dies. Individual plants grow in rosettes of fleshy blue-green spiked leaves tipped with sharp spines. Colonies sprout from roots and seeds of parent plant. Green to yellowish flowers cluster at the top of a rapidly sprouting stalk. Native Americans used this plant for cordage, needles, soap, food and as an ointment or balm for treating burns and wounds. Blooms: May-October



SOTOL: (*Dasylirion leiophyllum*) Included in the Lily family, Sotol has long narrow leaves edged with sharp downward-pointing spines that form a rosette cluster around base. Papery flowers cluster toward the top of a tall stalk. Male plants usually bloom before the females. Native Americans used this plant for weaving, roasting and eating, as well as making mescal, an intoxicating drink. It makes an excellent lightning rod, sometimes starting wildfires. Blooms: June-August



OCOTILLO: (*Fouquieria splendens*) Often called Candlewood or Coachwhip, it is easily identified by its cluster of wavy, spiny stems reaching up to 15 ft. tall. Ocotillo survives long periods of dryness by dropping its leaves and appearing dead but leaves quickly reappear following rains. Clusters of bright red flowers bloom at the end of each branch, attracting hummingbirds and other pollinators. Native Americans used this plant as a dye and to relieve fatigue as well as a wide variety of other ailments. Today it is widely used as an ornamental or as hedges. Blooms: April-June



PRICKLY PEAR: (*Opuntia engelmanni* or *macrocentra*) These cacti are easily identified by large flat geometrical pads ranging from green to purple-red and covered with spines. Flowers are yellow to bronze and mature into a purple fruit. Native Americans used this plant as a healing remedy. The pads (nopales) can be skinned and pan fried while the fruits, (tunas) can be made into jelly or cactus candy. Blooms: May-August or April-June (depending upon type)



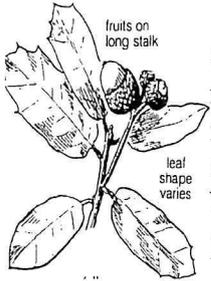
CHOLLA: (*Opuntia imbricata/leptocaulis*) This branchy, thorn covered cactus can reach up to 9 feet tall. New plants quickly sprout from joints fallen from the parent plant. Depending upon type, flowers are yellow or magenta-colored and ripen into fruits that can stay on the plant year round. Native Americans might have used these plants as walking canes, decoration or building materials. Fruits can be eaten immediately or stored for future use. Berries on the smaller variety can be made into an intoxicating drink. Blooms: After rains, May-June, or March-July (depending upon type)



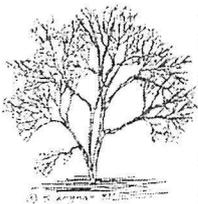
TORREY YUCCA: (*Yucca torreyi*) Easily identified by its wide, yellow-green leaves edged with curling fibers that can reach up to 30 inches long and protrude from an often branched trunk usually covered by previous years' growth. Flower-heads form at the end of a long (8') stalk forming pods that stay on the plant year round. Native Americans used the plant leaves for cordage and weaving. The roots are used to make soap. Both fruits and flowers are edible to humans. Blooms: April-May



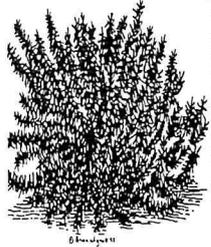
RED BERRY JUNIPER: (*Juniperus pinchotti*) The most common juniper in the area is identified by its low, spreading clumps or shrubs. Leaves are scaly and branched with furrowed bark. What appear to be berries are actually cones that change from green to coppery red in the fall. Juniper regenerates rapidly from burned or cut stumps, does well in rocky areas, and is drought resistant. Native Americans used the berries as food, the bark as diaper lining, and the wood as fuel. Juniper leaves were brewed as tea to relieve colds and lung congestion. The berries provide important winter food for birds. Early settlers used it for fence posts. Blooms: October



GRAY OAK: (*Quercus grisea*) The most common oak in the park is in the Beech family and represents one of over eight hundred species of plants in the park. From a distance, this evergreen may appear dusty or scrubby and has scaly grey bark. Leaves are a grey-green, smooth, usually margined and lack lobes. Sometimes found near a water source, they were not plentiful enough for Native Americans to have used the acorn in the traditional sense, but are grazed on by deer and porcupines. Native Americans did brew a coffee-like beverage from the small acorns. Blooms: April



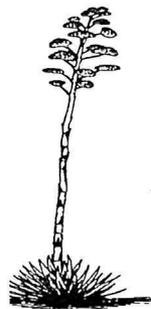
HONEY MESQUITE: (*Prosopis glandulosa*) Part of the Legume family, the zigzag branches and long alternating leaves composed of paired leaflets characterize this tree or shrub. Branches are lined with paired spike-like thorns. Cream to yellow flowers mature into long, gently curving seedpods which are slightly constricted between seeds. Deeply furrowed bark may be sticky or gummy to the touch. A very hardy, disease resistant plant, it is often a good sub-surface water indicator. Native Americans used the plant seeds for grinding into flour high in protein, while the pods are high in sugar content. The gummy resin was used as glue. It is an important source of nectar and pollen for insects. Today it is used for fence posts, barbeque flavoring, landscaping and fuel. Blooms: April-May



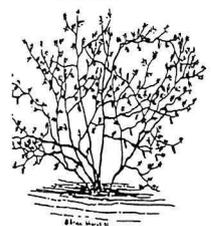
ALGERITA: (*Berberis trifoliolata*) From a distance, this is the only blue-grey shrub in the park. It grows up to eight feet tall with sharp, pointed, holly-like leaves. The fruit is a round berry, usually red, but may be blue to blue-black. Tart-flavored berries ripen in June. Birds and other wildlife eat the berries. The berries contain the drug berberine, and have been used to treat toothaches. A brilliant dye may be extracted from the woody branches. Indians used the berries as food. Today's people use them as jam. Blooms: February-March. Heavily scented blossoms perfume the entire park.



CREOSOTE: (*Larrea tridentata*) Typical of the desert low lands, this plant can live for several thousands of years. Identified by yellow flowers that are twisted lengthwise with five petals, it is part of the Clatrop family. Seedpods are round, white, fuzzy balls. After a rain the plant produces a strong musky odor that can perfume the entire park. Thick, waxy, evergreen leaves help retard evaporation. While it may be toxic to some animals, Native Americans used the plant leaves and branches for treating diseases ranging from cancer to intestinal disorders and venereal disease. Insects lay eggs in the bark producing a resinous incrustation called lac which was used as glue. Blooms: April-May and after heavy rains



NEW MEXICO AGAVE: (*Agave neomexicana*) Deep blue-green leaves can be much more robust than the lechuguilla and form a rosette that can be up to 2' (60cm) across. Usually found in the higher elevations of the Gualalupe Mountains, the plant blooms only once in its life following a 20-40 year period of storing nutrients. The flowers are an important source of nectar for birds and the seeds are collected by rodents. The Native Americans roasted the heart of this plant in mescal pits (rings of cracked rock) and wove the plant fibers into mats, ropes, and sandals. Blooms June-August



CATCLAW MIMOSA: (*Mimosa biuncifera*) This common shrub grows 3-7' (1-2m) tall, preferring dry, rocky areas. The plant is found in middle to low lands and has recurved (backwards) claws with leaves of four to eight pairs of segments. The round, cream-colored flower heads are about 1/2" (1-3cm) across. This plant, also known as *estrellita* (little star) is in the Legume or Fabaceae family whose pods are eaten, providing protein and sugar, a staple for many desert tribes. Blooms: May-August