

# Petrified Forest

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

## Red and Orange Flowering Plants of the Short Grass Prairie

Illustrations by Jeanne R. Janish, courtesy of Southwest Parks and Monuments Association.

### GLOBE MALLOW (*Sphaeralcea* ssp.)



Five known species of mallow are known to exist in the park. All have orange flowers with 5 petals, except *S. fendleri* which has pink flowers. The original marshmallow came from this same genre of plants. Cotton, okra, and ornamental hibiscus are in the mallow family.

**Habitat:** Desert slopes, flats, and among pinon/juniper. Can be found in California, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico.

**Ethnobotany:** The sticky stems of the plant have been used as a substitute for chewing gum.

**Blooms:** *S. ambigua* blooms August - September. *S. incana* blooms Late April - October.

**Height:** 1 ft. - 4 ft.

**Flower Color:** Orange (*S. fendleri* pink)



(Castilleja ssp.)



There are two species of paintbrush in the park: Indian Paintbrush (*C. chromosa*), and Long Leaf Paintbrush (*C. linariaefolia*). Both have bright orange to red flowers. The leaves are grayish/green.

In the park, *C. chromosa* can be found growing along the rim of the Painted Desert. *C. linariaefolia* grows in sand, especially along washes.

**Natural History:** The genus name honors Spanish botanist Domingo Castilleja. The plant is used medicinally and in ceremonies by the Hopi. Most Indian Paintbrushes are root parasites, establishing connections with roots of other species.

**Blooms:** *C. Chromosa*, May - June, *C. linariaefolia* July - September

**Height:** *C. chromosa*: 4 - 16 in, *C. linariaefolia*: 1 - 3 ft.

**Flower Color:** Red - Orange

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## **TAMARISK, SALT CEDAR**

(*Tamarix pentandra*)



Tamarisk is an introduced plant which is native to the desert regions of Arabia and the Middle East. Eight species of this plant were introduced to the United States during the early 1900s for erosion control. Like most introduced plants, Tamarisk has become very widespread, often virtually "choking out" otherwise perennial water sources, and otherwise native plants.

Efforts to eradicate this alien species are underway in the park.

**Habitat:** Near washes and water sources, where it is often the dominant plant.

**Blooms:** March - August

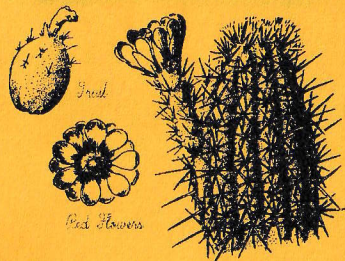
**Height:** Can reach heights of up to 15 or 20 ft.

**Flower Color:** Pink



## **STRAWBERRY HEDGEHOG CACTUS**

(Echinocereus fendleri)



This cactus can be differentiated from the more common prickly pear cactus by its bright red flowers (instead of the orange/yellow flowers of prickly pear) and its "barrel" shape (versus the "pad" shape of prickly pear). The flowers grow along the side of the stem and do not close at night (as do the blossoms of some other species of cacti).

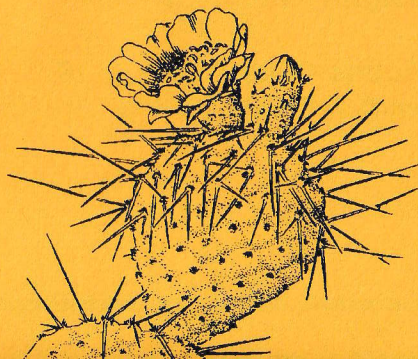
**Habitat:** A common plant of the Pinyon-Juniper region. It is found in the park at upper elevations and in grasslands. It can be seen flowering along the trail at Crystal Forest.

**Ethnobotany:** The Navajo call this cactus "heart twister." According to legend, Navajo people were made ill by eating the juicy fruit of this hedgehog cactus which has a strawberry-like odor. It is therefore customary for them to offer a hair of the head to the "Cactus People" before they eat the fruit to prevent their hearts from being twisted with pain. Fruit is a yellow/green oval shaped succulent (about 1 inch long). The fruit has a thin rind and spines drop off as ripening occurs.

**Blooms:** May - July

## **PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS**

(Opuntia ssp.)



Prickly pear is perhaps the most common cactus plant in the southwest. Four species (all in the genus *Opuntia*) grow in the park. It blooms orange to bright yellow. Numerous spines protrude from a pad. Like all cacti, Prickly Pears have long shallow roots which allow the plant to soak up available moisture and store it in the fleshy joints. These joints expand and become fat when there is plenty of moisture.

They contract and become thin and wrinkled during times of drought.

**Blooms:** May - June

**Flower Color:** Orange - Yellow

**Natural History:** Like most cactus flowers, the blooms of the prickly pear generally last only one day. This cactus is used as forage by Javelina in the Sonoran desert region, and occasionally by other mammals



when the spines are burned off.

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**ROCKY MOUNTAIN  
BEEPLANT, SKUNKWEED**

(*Cleome serrulata*)



Prior to 1994, this plant was only known to grow in the park along the Puerco River drainage. In July, 1994 it was found blooming near the Rainbow Forest Museum. Outside of the park it is common along roadsides, forming a large cluster of light pink to red-colored flowers. The flowers have a feathery appearance because of the long stamens. The leaves of this plant have an unpleasant odor when crushed, hence the name Skunkweed.

**Natural History:** The flowers supply a large quantity of nectar and are a good source of honey.

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**Please Remember:** National Parks belong to everyone! All resources are preserved. Stiff penalties exist for removal of petrified wood, rocks, artifacts **and plants**. By simply picking a flower, one is denying others the opportunity to view beauty, denying the plant its natural right to reproduce and denying birds and butterflies an important source of food.