

The Amazing Cacti

The Saguaro (Suh-WAH-oh) cactus is native to Arizona and Western Sonora. Some extend beyond range into California and Sinaloa which is relatively restricted. Its scientific name is Carnegiea gigantea and it belongs to the Cactaceae family. It is bound to the Southwest region but it can also grow in some parts of the western region. Its found in deserts.

The Saguaro can live up to 200 years. At the age of 50 they have their first flower. When 75, they develop side branches. They can reach the height of 40 to 60 feet high and can weigh up to 6 tons (if its large and full of water.) Now that's fascinating! It has 15 to 20 woody ribs and its bark proof because of its waxy skin. This cactus might be big, but it can't give you alot of shade. It does help its environment in other ways.

This plant is keystone because it provides homes to birds such as Gila Woodpeckers, Gilded Flickers, Elf owls, house finches, ash-throated flycatchers, and Purple Martins. Furthermore, this cactus provides hunting spots, rest-stops, and the stems and arms are used to stabilize nests of larger birds. Guess what there's more! This plant produces food in the scarcest time in the desert, I would call it the giving plant. Its fruit and flowers are edible. Each Saguaro produces 150 fruit in a few months. That's alot!

The Pima people are Native Americans who lived in the desert. The Pima would use the dead woody ribs of the Saguaro to make long poles to get the fruit. They ate the fruit and made syrup, jam, jelly, and wine for ceremonial purposes. When the cactus dies they use its ribs to make fences and shirle ranchos.

This cactus inspired me because it pulled me in and said "Pick me. I have all the characteristics you want such as I'm keystone, I have relation to Native Americans, and I'm in a different state." This plant represents Arizona because when you think of Arizona (or other deserty place) you might think of this cactus even though you don't know its name. This project taught me alot so thank you Fairchild Botanic Garden and the Plant-Conservation Alliance.

Sources

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