



Why Observe?

Saguaro cacti are an important plant for numerous inhabitants of the Sonoran Desert, including the indigenous Tohono O'odham. They are an important source of nectar for lesser long-nosed bats, white-wing doves, and a variety of insects. Nest cavities, excavated into the sides of the saguaro, provide shelter for birds including Gila woodpeckers, flickers, elf owls, and purple martins. The fruit are eaten by numerous animals and are also collected by the O'odham to be made into a syrup for food and for a ceremonial wine that honors the new year that comes with the summer rains. The timing of the saguaro wine ceremony is completely dependent on when the fruits ripen. With increased drought and heat, saguaros, and all they support, could be affected.



Trica Oshant Hawkins. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

Tips for Identification

Saguaros are tall, green columnar cacti (up to 50 ft. in height) with a central column from which none to several arms emerge. The body of the saguaro appears "pleated" (similar to an accordion) to allow for expansion for water retention. Large white flowers appear on the tops of the main body and arms starting in spring. Fruits become deep red and mature in mid-June.



William Herron via Flickr. [CC BY-SA 2.0](#) (cropped)

Be aware there is variation from individual to individual within a species, so your plant may not look exactly like the ones pictured. If you are uncertain whether or not a phenophase is occurring, report a "?" for its status until it becomes clear what you are observing after subsequent visits.



Flowers or flower buds
One or more fresh open or unopened flowers or flower buds are visible on the plant. Include flower buds or inflorescences that are swelling or expanding, but do not include those that are tightly closed and not actively growing (dormant). Also do not include wilted or dried flowers.

[Linnaea Mallette via Needpix.com](#). Public domain

Note: this photo shows flower buds, open flowers, and fruit (these unripe fruits have dried flowers attached to tips).



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Fruits

One or more fruits are visible on the plant. For *Carnegiea gigantea*, the fruit is a fleshy, juicy, very large berry that changes from green to yellow-green, reddish-green or red and splits open to expose red pulp filled with black seeds. Do not include empty fruits that no longer have any red pulp or seeds.



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Open flowers

One or more open, fresh flowers are visible on the plant. Flowers are considered "open" when the reproductive parts (male stamens or female pistils) are visible between or within unfolded or open flower parts (petals, floral tubes or sepals). Do not include wilted or dried flowers.



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Ripe fruits

One or more ripe fruits are visible on the plant. For *Carnegiea gigantea*, a fruit is considered ripe when it has turned yellow-green, reddish-green or red and has split open to expose red pulp filled with black seeds. Do not include empty fruits that no longer have any red pulp or seeds.

Phenophases not pictured: Recent fruit or seed drop