With spiny outsides and great abilities to store water and thrive, or do well, in hot, dry climates, the cactus has more to it than meets the eye. This week, The Mini Page takes a look at the world of cacti.

Cactuses

Cactuses, sometimes called cacti, are a flowering plant family native to North and South America. Mexico has the most variety of cactuses, where the plants have adapted to arid, or dry, climates. In most species of cactus, the leaves are often modified into spines, or needlelike points sticking out of the plants. The spines make it simpler for cactuses to store the water.

The root system of a cactus is often shallow and thin, so not much water is absorbed. However, what moisture a cactus does collect is stored within storage cells used to help the plant produce energy and food.

Cactus wren

Some animals in the desert depend on cactuses and their ability to adapt for their survival. The prickly pear cactus is a source of food for animals and insects.

Saguaro cactus

A saguaro (su-WAHR-oh) is a treelike type of cactus with white flowers and fruit that bloom in the spring and red fruit in the summer. Saguaros are native to the Sonoran Desert in the southwestern United States and Northern Mexico. They can grow up to 30 feet tall and can have up to 25 “arms.”

Given the right conditions, a saguaro can live to be 200 years old, but they grow very slowly. A 10-year-old saguaro might be just 1.5 inches tall. A grown saguaro cactus can absorb and store up to 200 gallons of water.

Saguaros are the largest cactus species in the U.S. A fully grown saguaro cactus can weigh more than 2,000 pounds.

People sometimes boil saguaro pulp to make syrup used for jams and jellies. The seeds from the fruit of the saguaro can be dried and ground into flour.

To Native Americans, the saguaro is a symbol of standing tall, providing nourishment and shelter to others, and being able to adapt to surroundings.

Resources

On the Web:

• kids.saddlecreek.com

At the library:

• “Cactus Hotel” by Brenda Z. Guiberson

Mini Jokes

Callie: What did the happy cactus say to the grumpy cactus?

Cameron: “Don’t be so prickly!”

Cook’s Corner

Cheese Tea Biscuits

You’ll need:

• 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, grated
• 2 cups flour
• 2 cups rice cereal

What to do:

1. Mix all ingredients in a bowl.
2. Make into a roll about 2 to 3 inches thick.
3. Place roll in refrigerator until it becomes hard and easier to handle.
4. Roll into 1/2-inch disks, place on an ungreased cookie sheet.
5. Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for about 10 minutes.

Mini Note

New research says the movement of ocean water within a tsunami generates its own magnetic field ahead of the big changes in sea level, which could possibly lead to better warnings of the hazardous waves. Using magnetic and sea level changes from tsunamis that hit Samoa in 2009 and Chile in 2010, the study authors found that the tsunami-generated magnetic fields are so clearly evident that a wave height of only a few centimeters can be detected.

For later:

Look in your newspaper for articles about plants.

Teachers: Follow and interact with The Mini Page on Facebook!

Books from The Mini Page are wonderful resources and make great gifts! See all of our Mini Page Products at MiniPageBooks.com, or call 800-643-6480 for more information.

Support your local libraries! Mini Page Books, 1301 Willow, Kansas City, MO 64106. Include $4.00 shipping and handling per order.

For more information, visit theworldofwords.com/mini-page.