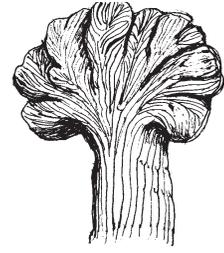
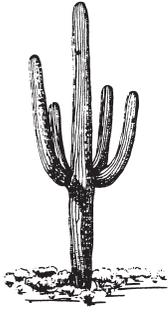


The Cristate(Crested) Saguaro



What is a cristate saguaro?



The saguaro cactus is *Carnegiea gigantea*, an iconic plant of the Sonoran Desert and Saguaro National Park. Within the park boundaries our dense cactus forest is populated with about two million saguaros. Most saguaros normally grow in a columnar

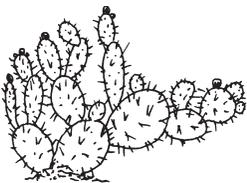
fashion, producing arms with viable fruit. However, some cacti grow in an unique fan-like pattern which is referred to as cristate or crested. Though these saguaros are somewhat rare, about 75 live within the park boundaries.

What is the mystery behind the cristate saguaro?

Biologists disagree as to why some saguaros grow in this unusual form. Some speculate that it is a genetic mutation. Others say it is the result of a lightning strike or freeze damage. At this point we simply do not know what causes this rare, crested form. Even if the saguaro has a cristate pattern, the saguaro will still

produce viable flowers, fruit, and possibly arms. Like all columnar saguaros, no two cristate saguaros are the same. Many mysterious growth formations can happen in a cristate. For example, a columnar arm can grow from the crest and arms can be crested.

Does cristation only occur in saguaros?



Cristation can happen in other cactus as well. Within the park, biologists have found crested barrel, cholla, prickly pear, and pincushion cacti. The fan like formation will occur the

same way in these other cacti. Cristation occurs more often in barrel cactus; it is rarer to witness other cacti with the cristate formation.

See a cristate saguaro? Let us know!



On the back of this brochure is a map of a few crested saguaros that can be found in the park. However, since the park is vast with a very dense cactus forest, sometimes we miss crested saguaros. If you see one that is not on these maps, please notify the visitor center of the location and if possible provide a picture. You can also post it on

one of the social media outlets and tag Saguaro National Park in the picture.

Remember, the desert is a special and fragile environment. If you see a cristate that is off trail, look at it through binoculars or use the zoom lens on your camera. By staying on the trail, you will help protect and preserve the desert.

Tucson Mountain District



1. Traveling north on Sandario, a crested saguaro is about 60 feet right of the park welcome sign. No trail access.
2. Traveling north on Sandario, a crested saguaro will be at least 100 feet off the road on the right, about 0.5 mile north of Sandario/Mile Wide intersection. No trail access.
3. Exit the Red Hills Visitor center and turn right. In 0.2 miles, look to your right. A crested saguaro will be 60 feet from the road. No trail access. For extended viewing, park at the left side parking area, 0.1 miles from the crested saguaro and walk on the road for a better view.
4. Park at King Canyon trailhead and hike 1.5 miles along the King Canyon trail. A crested saguaro will be upslope to your left, roughly 75 feet from the trail.
5. After an immediate turn onto the Signal Hill road, look closely to the right of the road. A crested saguaro is about 80 feet from road, no trail access.
6. Before parking at Signal Hill access area, a crested saguaro will be roughly 100 feet on the right side of the road. No trail access.
7. Traveling north on Sandario, turn right on Rudasill. A saguaro with a crested arm will be less than 0.25 miles after the turn onto Rudasill, 40 feet on the right side from the road. No trail access.
8. Park at Cam-boh picnic area, cross Picture Rocks road and head onto Roadrunner trail. About a 0.10 mile walk, a crested saguaro will be 20 feet off the right side of the trail.

