



Prickly Plants and Peculiar Pronunciations!

The diverse mix of Native American, Hispanic and Anglo cultures is found throughout southern Arizona in local customs, architecture and language. The derivation and pronunciation of many common words reflects this rich blend of cultures.

Tohono O’odham
(toe-HOE-noe
aw-aw-TAHM)

The tribal name of the Native Americans of south central Arizona, Tohono O’odham, translates into English as “The Desert People”. Justly proud of their ability to live in the desert where others would struggle to survive, the

Tohono O’odham continue to harvest the desert’s bounty today. Each June, they harvest the fruits of the saguaro, producing jelly, syrup and ceremonial wine.

Tucson
(TOO-sahn)

The name of the city has gone through several changes, an evolution that has taken place over several hundred years. The Tohono O’odham called their village at the base of Sentinel Peak, “Stjukson”, meaning village at the base of black mountain.

Initially, the Spanish spelled it Tucson, pronouncing the “c” when they spoke the name. Americans changed it once more. General Cooke spelled it Teuson in 1846. Today, we have a Native American name with a Spanish spelling and an American pronunciation.

Saguaro
(sah-WAH-roe)

The word “saguaro” is a Spanish version of a Native American word, possibly from the Cahilla people of Mexico. The Tohono O’odham word for the cactus is “hashan”, but they often refer to saguaros as “O’odham” or “people”.

The saguaro is a focal point in the culture of the Tohono O’odham. Their regard for the saguaro is reflected in many of their creation stories. For the traditional Tohono O’odham, the saguaro is not just a plant, it is another form of humanity.

Ocotillo
(oh-koh-TEE-yoh)

When there is sufficient moisture, the ocotillo is quickly covered with small green leaves, which greatly increase the plant’s ability to produce its food through photosynthesis. When moisture is scarce, the ocotillo sheds its leaves. It then relies upon the chlorophyll in its stems for food production. Look closely at the stems for the green lines in the bark. In April and May, red flower clusters grow on the ends of the stems, providing migrating hummingbirds with much needed nourishment. The flowers account for the name of the plant. In Spanish, ocotillo means “little torch”.



Javelina
(ha-vuh-LEAN-a)

Also known as the collared peccary, the javelina is a small pig-like animal, yet it is no relation to true pigs. Evolving in the Americas, the javelina developed large canine teeth and a tough,

blunt snout, perfect tools for digging up roots and tubers. The roots, fruits and pads of the prickly pear cactus make up more than half of the javelina's diet.

Jojoba
(ho-HO-buh)

A shrub with thick, leathery, light gray-green leaves, the jojoba holds its leaves upright, reducing their exposure to the sun. This decreases the loss of water through transpiration by reducing the heat in the leaves.

The jojoba produces an acorn-like bean that is rich in oily wax. The high quality oil of the jojoba is used in fine machine oil, cosmetics and shampoos.

Gila
(HE-la)

The Gila River, which flows from the New Mexico border near Duncan, to the Colorado River at Yuma, gives its name to many things: Gila County, the town of Gila Bend, the Gila woodpecker, and the Gila monster.

The Gila woodpecker is one of the architects of the Sonoran Desert. It carves its home within the tissue of the saguaro. When the nest cavity hardens, the bird lays its eggs within the cavity without placing any soft nesting material beneath them. When the young have fledged, the woodpecker abandons the nest, never to return. But it does not remain vacant. Eighteen varieties of cavity nesting birds are known to take up residence in an abandoned saguaro cavity.

One of only two truly venomous lizards in the world, and the only one in the United States, the Gila monster has bright, distinctive coloring, a heavy body and a thick tail. Although active during daylight, these large lizards are seldom seen. Their diet includes small rodents, birds and eggs.



Rincon
(RIN-kahn)

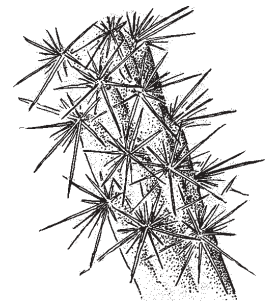
Rincon, in Spanish, means inside corner. Viewed from above, the Rincon Mountains form a corner. Tanque Verde Ridge forms the western line of the angle, extending northeast

through Tanque Verde Peak to Mica Mountain, the point of the angle. From there, a line of ridges extends south to Rincon Peak, forming the eastern line of the angle.

Cholla
(CHOY-yah)

The Spanish word for segment, cholla is the name of a group of cacti with cylindrical, loosely attached joints. These segments will break off from the parent plant and attach themselves to passing animals. Having seeds that are rarely fertile and fruit that seldom ripens, the cholla relies on animals, including humans, to carry these heavily spined segments to new locations where they will fall to the ground, take root and establish a new plant.

The cactus wren, state bird of Arizona, often builds its home among the spines of the cholla.



Ajo
(Ah-ho)

The small town of Ajo, located southwest of Tucson, is named after the Spanish word for garlic.

In good years, wild garlic grows all over the hills of the Ajo mountains.