



New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science
A Walk Through New Mexico
Native Species Scavenger Hunt

Take a short walk to observe the natural world and learn about some of the plants that are native to New Mexico.

The exhibit is divided into the geographic regions of New Mexico. These regions differ in many ways. Read the introduction signs about the vegetation of each region.

As you walk through this landscape, you can record your answers to the questions, or just focus on your surroundings. Start at the east end of the exhibit at the corner of Mountain and 18th St. and work your way along the path. Enjoy your exploration of New Mexico's amazing native flora.

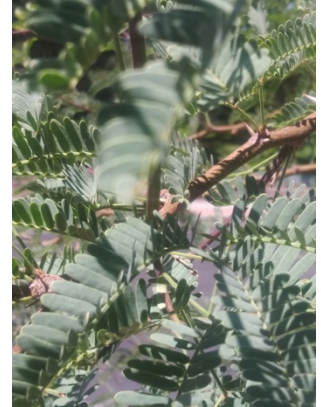
We suggest that you wear comfortable shoes, apply sunscreen, and bring some water with you. Have fun and explore the natural wonder of New Mexico ...

1. Observe the trees. There are several different kinds. Most of the trees you see here are **deciduous**, these are fruit-bearing trees that have leaves that fall off in the fall. However, there are at least three **coniferous** trees in the exhibit, trees with needles instead of leaves and cones instead of fruit. Can you find the conifer shown in the photos below?



(HINT: look in the Southern Rio Grande Rift region)

2. Now find a tree that looks like the one in these pictures. This is a **mesquite** tree, or **Prosopis**. They can be recognized by round, fern-like leaves, the thorns in the bark, and at the right time of year, fuzzy caterpillar-like flowers or long, sometimes curly, bean pods.



If you look carefully in the branches of the mesquite trees, you might find an **ootheca** (o·o·the·ca) which is the egg-mass many mantises will hatch from. An ootheca looks like this:

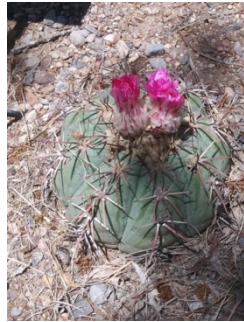


(Hint: When you're standing on the path, directly under some mesquite branches, look up.)

3. You might also find an ootheca in the branches of a Creosote bush (*Larrea Tridentate*) Creosote bushes have three distinct features: thin, sturdy branches which can grow in wavy, vertical formations, tiny waxy leaves, and depending on the time of year, little yellow flowers or round fuzzy fruit. Can you find a Creosote bush? Does it contain an ootheca?

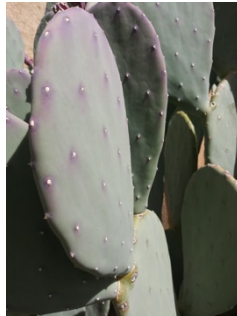


4. Find two varieties of cacti in the exhibit: Echinocereus, and Opuntia.



Echinocereus cacti are commonly called hedgehog or barrel variety cacti. They generally have cylindrical stems and grow close to the ground. They can have a single stem, or many different branches.

Opuntia cacti you might recognize as **Prickly Pear**, but there are many distinct species with different types of spines, fruits, flowers, and growth patterns.



Look closely at a few different plants of **Echinocereus cacti**. Can you find three differences between the plants you found?

Do their spines grow in different patterns similar to this one?

Do they have differently shaped stems?

What else do you notice?



Now look at a few different plants of Opuntia cacti and find differences. You have observed different species! Write down or draw your observations.

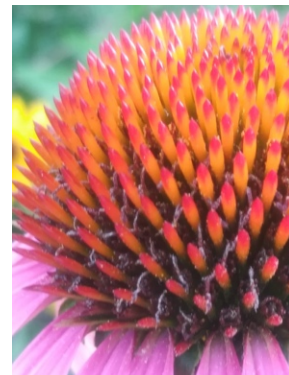
5. This plant looks like a yucca, but is actually a member of the Asparagus family. **Sacahuista** (*Nolina microcarpa*). It has a bushy base of long winding leaves that look like tall thick grass, and a single spire 10 feet tall. When in bloom, the spires attract **pollinators** of many varieties. Did you find it?



6. Now look close to the ground for a group of **succulents** with light grey/ teal leaves that grow in spiny **rosettes**. You found **Agave palmeri**. You'll know them by the "teeth marks" their leaves leave on each other from before they open.



7. The most abundant type of flora in the Southern Rocky Mountain region is Asteraceae, these can be identified by their appearance, with a halo of petals surrounding a **capricum** or head. They appear to be one flower, but are actually many tiny flowers clumped together. Some familiar specimens from this family are sunflowers and blanket flowers. Do you see any Asteraceae (like these below) in this part of the exhibit?

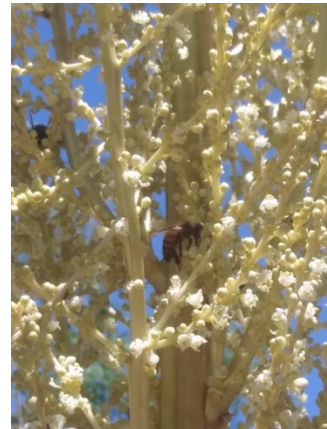


8. As you walk through the landscape, keep your eyes peeled for some of the other visitors and inhabitants of the exhibit shown below:



Butterflies or moths
(Lepidoptera)

Bees, *(Anthophila)*



Spiders, *(Araneae)*





Fleabane(*Erigeron*)



Prairie
coneflowers(*Ratibida*)



9. What else did you see on your exploration of New Mexico's native plants? Write down or draw it here.