The Arizona Native Plant Society
Phoenix Chapter

Our Mission is to promote knowledge, appreciation, conservation, and restoration of Arizona native plants and their habitats.

Visit Our Website

Visit Our Events Page

Meetings are held the first Monday of each month from 6:00 to 7:00 PM with a presentation by an invited speaker followed by an optional business meeting from 7:00 to 8:00 PM. Both members and non members are welcome! Here is the link to the meeting, you can also use it to RSVP and add it to your calendar.

October 2026 Newsletter

November Meeting Speaker: Mike Hills

Topic: “Tour of the Curandero Trail at BTA; Native Plants and Their Traditional Medicinal Uses”

Mike grew up in Southern California and Arizona and has gardened in low desert Arizona with his family since moving to Tucson in 1965. In addition to gardens, fruit and nut trees, rabbits and poultry, Mike and his family managed honeybee colonies in Scottsdale in the 1970’s, before the arrival of the Africanized honeybees, and again more recently with his sister Marie. The many native bee species and other pollinators of the Sonoran Desert have always fascinated him. Any gardening interest matches well with helping our threatened native pollinators.

With a bachelor’s degree in Agronomy and Plant Sciences from the University of Arizona CALS, Mike has worked in the turf grass and forage planting seed industry since 1980 working with customers throughout the USA and overseas. He serves on the board of the Arizona Crop Improvement Association and also chaired the Maricopa County Extension Advisory Board in the past. A Maricopa County Master Gardener since 1996, Mike presents on a number of

gardening & pollinator related topics and also guides herb tours occasionally at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum. Past President of the Arizona Herb Association, Mike manages the herb demonstration garden at Maricopa County Extension in Phoenix with fellow Herbie and MG Pam Perry.

RSVP to the monthly meeting and add it to your calendar using this link.



Officer Update!

Welcome Peter Pawliuk as our new vice-president! As vice-president, Peter is responsible for supporting the group's mission and organizing and running volunteer events. With that our board is now complete!

We would also like to welcome Carly Mendoza who is now running our Facebook and Instagram pages. By day, Carly leads Learning & Development for a nonprofit accounting firm, but her weekends belong to nature. As a native plant enthusiast, she loves supporting the Phoenix Chapter through creative social media content. When she's not behind a screen, she's out in the wild gardening, backpacking, or hiking. She's doing a phenomenal job making custom plant of the week posters and event notices. Go check out her work and say hi!

Happenings: Current and ongoing activities

Budding Botanist at the Desert Botanical Garden - The Desert Botanical Garden is restarting their Budding Botanist program to provide a crash course into botany and teach AZNPS members how to ID plants and collect field specimens. The goal is to create a flora of Papago Park as part of The Plant Atlas Project of Arizona (PAPAZ). More info on PAPAZ can be seen on our website. Attendees will learn how plants function, how to ID plants, how to collect plants in

the field and how plants are entered into herbarium. It is a 2.5 day botany bootcamp including classroom and field experience!

Registration is currently full! Please keep an eye out for any future courses.

Wednesdays from 12:00PM to 2:00PM - Restocking the Maricopa Native Seed Society is going well thanks to Roxanne Gabriel and volunteers. Roxanne carts tubs of seeds from her home to the South Mountain Library weekly. The tubs are filled with seed packets organized by common name. Gabriel also checks a nearby rack containing seed packets to be sure that a sufficient number of packets are available. Seed packets are arranged by grasses, trees, wildflowers, and shrubs. The packets are free to the public. Learn more about the seed library here: https://libguides.maricopa.edu/seed

You are cordially invited to participate with Roxanne on Wednesdays from 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM to restock the inventory for the South Mountain Community Library branch of the Maricopa Native Seed Library. Feel free to drop by. No need to stay for the whole time and all are welcome. Not necessary to be a member of the AZNPS.

We officially have seed packing material! If you are interested in creating seed packets for the library, please attend the seed restocking. We will restock the library then create seed packets by filling packets with native seeds.

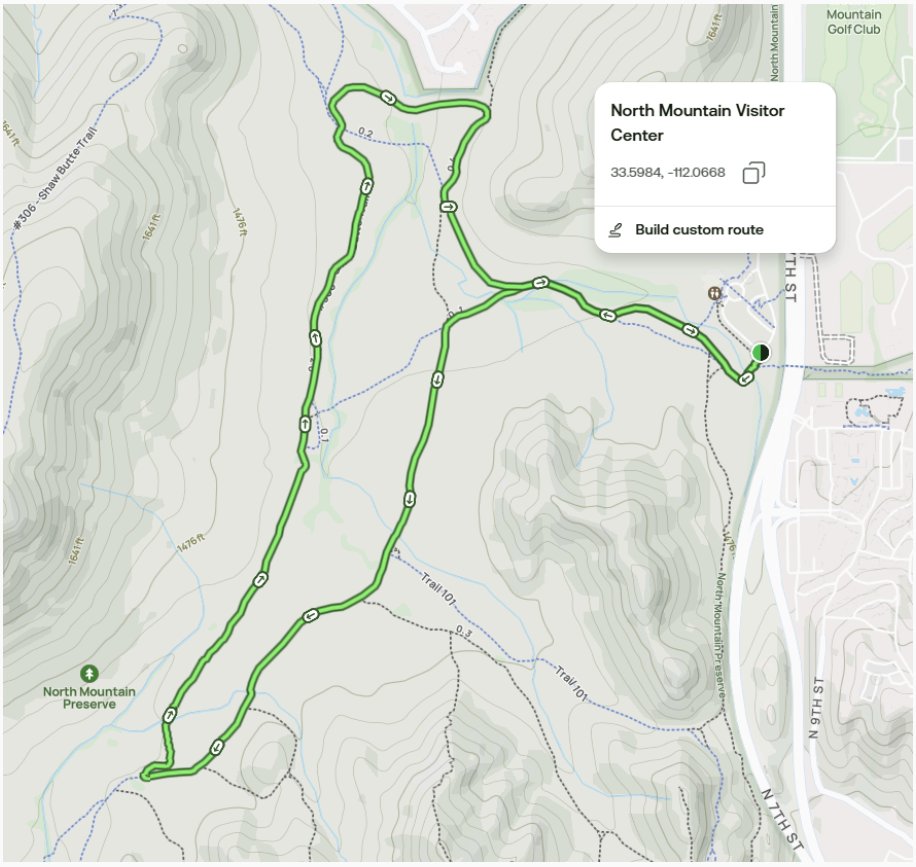
Note: We will be meeting on Thursday November 5th and 12th instead of Wednesday for the first two weeks of November.



November 15th from 8:00AM to 10:00AM - Join us for a **nature hike** around North Mountain. All are welcome including well-mannered pets and children. The hike is approximately 2.7 miles and rated as easy with minimal elevation gain (130 feet). Please bring plenty of water and sunscreen! Trail information can be seen here.

We will meet November 15th @ 8:00 am - 10:00 am MST.

Address: North Mountain Visitor Center 12950 N 7th St, Phoenix, AZ 85022. Just show up and bring a friend, too.



Tour available at Center for Nature and Urban Wildlife (CNUW) - CNUW has invited us to tour their facility with the possibility of becoming a volunteer. CNUW maintains a small capacity native plant nursery and native seed collection which is the backbone of many of their restoration and student-driven projects. CNUW has offered to provide AZNPS-Phoenix chapter tours on the second Thursdays of the month at 1:00. Contact Daniela Howe at phoenixaznps@gmail.com for additional information.

Fall Gardening

October, a great month to buy a plant. “Tis the season!”

What a season it was, AZNPS members assisted with the sale at CNUW. Plant sales were booming everywhere and lots of new items for our gardens are ready for planting…which by the way, please check your newly purchased photosynthesizers for their culture and best time for putting roots in the ground. Looks like another successful step in greening our landscapes with native plants has happened. If you missed the sales this fall, keep on the lookout for spring events or get some seeds from the Maricopa Native Seed Library at a branch near you. See additional seed libraries here.

For vegetable gardeners, fall is a great time to plant most vegetables and fruit trees. This is outside the purview of the native plant society but interested parties can check out Growing In the Garden for information on growing fruits and vegetables in the valley.



Step Up: Engage with Others

Inform friends, neighbors and others about Grow Native, a movement that AZNPS has initiated at the state level in order to educate and inform local residents to utilize our existing natural ecosystem to better serve the health of our environment by reducing the amount of invasive plant species that are being sold commercially. Not only do local plants look incredible, but they take far less maintenance than non-native plants. This includes healthy local bugs, lizards and other critters (and yes, they are helpful!), they sustain local pollinators such as honeybees, and they avoid the proliferation of invasive species. Our hope is that you can quickly see local plants that match the aesthetics you are looking for in your own landscaping needs. Using the resources and see plant list at https://aznps.com/grow-native/ We can begin building our native garden!

Protect Arizona Flora & Ownership Rights by informing your family, friends and neighbors about the wonders of our native plants. Arizona is home to some of the rarest, unusual, and irreplaceable native desert flora found anywhere in the United States. Because many of these slow-growing specimens are decades old and impossible to quickly replace, the vast majority of native desert flora are strictly protected by state law. All land across Arizona belongs to an established entity — whether it is a federal or state government agency, a tribal nation, or a

private citizen. Plants cannot be legally removed, harvested, or transported from any property without the explicit, written permission of the landowner and an official permit from the Arizona Department of Agriculture. Lessees of state or federal land must secure specific, written authorization from their landlord agency before a native plant removal permit can be formally issued. For more information go to https://agriculture.az.gov/about-us/divisions/plant-services/native-plants



Horizons: Hands-on Educational Opportunities

The Desert Botanical Garden is restarting their Budding Botanist program to provide a crash course into botany and teach people how to ID plants and collect field specimens. They have partnered with AZNPS to provide training for members. The goal is to create a flora of Papago Park as part of The Plant Atlas Project of Arizona (PAPAZ). More info on PAPAZ can be seen on our website. Attendees will learn how plants function, how to ID plants, how to collect plants in the field and how plants are entered into herbarium. It is a 2.5 day botany bootcamp including classroom and field experience! The entire course is $25 and is run through the Desert Botanical Garden.

Registration is currently full! Please keep an eye out for any future courses. Please contact Mary Chisholm mchisholm@dbg.org if you have questions.

Invite your friends and family to join AZNPS to view our esteemed guest speakers. Speakers presentation is followed by questions from the audience from 6:00 to 7:00PM at our monthly meetings. Here is the link to the meeting, you can also use it to RSVP and add it to your calendar.

The Arizona Native Plant Society is active and growing throughout the State, with many chapters that you can join and learn new information. Learn about native plants habitats and culture in areas outside of Phoenix. Currently, AZNPS has eight chapters, based in Cochise County, Flagstaff, Peach Springs, Phoenix, Prescott, Santa Cruz County, Tonto Basin, Tucson, Upper Gila, White Mountains and Yuma. Please click on any chapter at https://aznps.com/chapters/ to get more information.

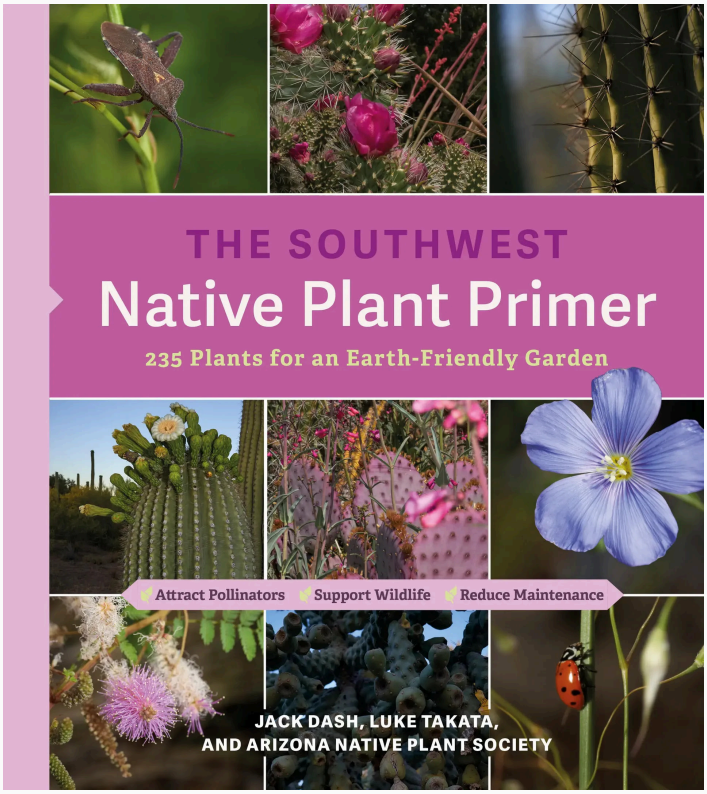
Explore and Connect

A merry group of AZNPS and other adventurers toured one small portion of the Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA) on Sunday October 25th. The day was beautiful made even better by the wonderful docents leading the hike. Due to the rain we've been getting, the plants were almost glowing, they were so vibrant. We enjoyed the hike so much that we took a vote and will be exploring the Wallace Garden in December. Members and non-members alike are invited to join us. We'd love to see you and a friend on the next walk at BTA. Specific details to follow.



Readings at a Glance: Synopsis of books, articles, YouTube videos, and other relevant published material.

Recommended: The Southwest Native Plant Primer: 235 Plants for an Earth-Friendly Garden By Jack Dash and Arizona Native Plant Society. The Southwest Native Plant Primer introduces 235 wildflowers, grasses, vines, cacti, and trees recommended for gardeners of any skill level interested in choosing native plants for a garden that makes a positive environmental impact. As the Southwest grows in population, and water becomes scarce, this book focuses on the role that native plants and water-wise planting can have in fostering sustainability for all life in the region.





A viewer friendly YouTube about using wild native plants in the Sonoran Desert for food resources. Did you know you can eat ocotillo flowers? Or make soap from a yucca? The

narrator describes uses including cautions about food and beverages from native plants. The descriptions focus on how the indigenous people used the plants as water sources, cooking vessels, and techniques for cooking the flowers and fruits. Highly recommended!

Cartoons, art and videos are welcome! If you have favorite sources of knowledge about plants, drop a line to Kathleen McCoy at Kathleen.mccoy@asu.edu.

Spotlight on Native Plants



Ironwood Tree (Olneya tesota): A keystone plant

By Kathleen M. McCoy

What thorny, long lived, slow-growing giant can nurture a wide range of plants, provide roosts for birds, and produce protein-rich leaves and seeds for animals? The Desert Ironwood tree from the Fabaceae family, a keystone plant, can do all the above and more! Although commonly found in washes and hillside drainages throughout the Sonoran Desert, the Ironwood is relatively rare in other parts of the United States. Thriving best in warm areas below 3,000ft, its natural boundaries correspond closely with those of the Sonoran Desert. Common names along the U.S./Mexico borderlands include: Desert Ironwood, Ironwood, Palo Fierro, and Palo de Hierro.

The perennial Ironwood can remain as a many stemmed spiny shrub no more than 2 meters high or erect and spreading with a low canopy with on thick trunk reaching 30 feet or more. One of the tallest trees in the desert scrub with a potential life span of 800 years, its canopy is used by nearly 150 bird species. Hawks and owls will also often use bare branches as perches and roosts. This rounded or vase shaped semi-deciduous native is covered with grayish-green leaves that endlessly drop and grow new leaves throughout the year. At the base of each leaf

are excruciatingly sharp, slightly curved paired spines, 1/4 to 1/2 inches long. Small pale lavender or purple flowers blanket the tree, but only 10-18 days in April – May. In southeast Arizona, ironwood flowers and fruit occur in most years, but are abundant only four years out often.

One generalist bee and two solitary specialist bees are commonly attracted to the flowers. After pollination occurs, ironwoods produce 1.2 – 2.4 long by 0.4-inch-wide slightly curved, knobby pods containing one to eight egg-shaped extremely hard-shelled shiny, dark brown seeds which are an important food source for native fauna.

Ironwood trees strongly influence the distribution and quantity of a large variety of species. The Ironwood functions as a “nurse plant” and a “habitat-modifying keystone species” benefitting over 500 other species in the region. Endemic to the Sonoran Desert region, Ironwood canopies provide microenvironments advantageous for understory plants. The winter microenvironments under mature ironwood trees may be 4 C (6.6° F) warmer than adjacent open environments and 1C (2.8° F) warmer than under other vegetation.

Ironwoods provide safe sites for seed dispersal and immature cactus, protect seedlings and saplings from extreme cold, damaging radiation and predation by ungulates, rabbits, and rodents. In addition to offering local and migrating birds perches and sites for building and nests, e.g., homes for the endangered cactus ferruginous pygmy owls. Piercing thorns, twisted roots, and low canopy protect small reptiles and desert mammals from larger prey. At least 62 reptiles and amphibians as well as 64 mammals employ Ironwoods for forage, cover, and nesting sites. One location in the Silverbell Mountains has been reported to shelter 188 kinds of bees, 25 ant colonies and 25 other types of insects.

The Ironwood is beneficial to humans, too and was widely used as food by the Cahuilla, Mohave, Papago, Pima and Seri southwestern American indigenous people. Peanut or soy flavored seeds were eaten by the Seri either raw, dry roasted, or ground for flour. Roasted seeds have been used as a substitute for coffee.

The wood of the Ironwood has social and economic impact as well. The name” Ironwood” refers to the hard, heavy heartwood, so dense it cannot float. The trunk is highly resistant to rotting, i.e., essentially non-biodegradable remaining in place up to 1600 years. Wood was used for fuel, as well as for making various kinds of tools and implements like digging sticks and shovels. Ironwood also added to the aesthetic of daily life by providing wood for weaving frames, musical instruments, and the beautiful carvings of the Seri.

The Ironwood Forest National Monument, located 25 miles northwest of Tucson, was established in June 2000 by presidential proclamation. At this time 129,000 acres of land provides protection for one of the richest areas of ironwood trees in the Sonoran Desert.

Article previously published in 2021 in AZNPS blog. A Spanish version is available upon request to Kathleen.mccoy@asu.edu.

Authors note: Please leave entire wild plants in their desert home. Most will die if moved. Seeds and cuttings, too, are on the “Do not take list” and depending where found can be illegal.

Volunteer

Volunteer: Whether you volunteer in the depths of the desert, an herbarium, or during a chat with a neighbor, volunteer to share with others your love of plants, and in particular

native plants. Now would be a good time to help another prepare their garden for 2027! Better yet, form a neighborhood group to make a small community garden in a willing neighbor's back or front yard!

Share photos: If you have native plants or local habitat photos to share, we would love to receive them from you, our members, and feature them on our website and in our newsletter. Be sure to let us know how you would like to be credited! Contact Daniela Howe at phoenixaznps@gmail.com for additional information.

Send ideas: Let us know if you would like to submit information to our newsletter, e.g., a story, a book or video review.

All ideas related to native plants of the Sonoran Desert are welcome. Many thanks for caring about our native plants!



Desert Lavender (*Condea emoryi*) Photo Credit: Sue Carnahan

Want to become a member?

The Arizona Native Plant Society is a statewide nonprofit organization devoted to Arizona's native plants. Many of our events are open to non-members, but if you are interested in becoming a member, click below to see more details.

Become a Member

About

Our Chapter Website
About AZNPS
Email: phoenixaznps@gmail.com

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