

# Cactuses



Members of the family **Cactaceae**, known as cacti (or cactuses), are divided into four subfamilies, two of which are covered here: **Opuntioideae** and **Cactoideae**. The **opuntias** include **chollas**, **prickly pears**, etc., while **cactoids** (the largest group) include **hedgehogs**, **barrels**, **saguaro**, etc. With one rare exception, cactuses are New World plants, thriving in dry habitats throughout the Americas from western Canada to Argentina. Boasting over 1800 species, cacti are notably identified by several distinguishing characteristics. Virtually all are **succulents** (possessing fleshy stems for storing water). The majority have smooth, fixed **spines** that are actually modified leaves designed to reduce water loss and protect the plant from herbivores. However, the defining trait is the presence of **areoles** (specialized branches) that variably give rise to spines; smaller, barbed, detachable bristles called **glochids**; or large bisexual flowers. Numerous species are represented in the Mojave region.