

# Cactus

A cactus is a kind of a plant adapted to hot, dry climates. Plants which live this kind of life-style are called xerophytes. Most are succulents, which store water.

Many cacti live in dry places, such as deserts. Most cacti have sharp thorns (stickers) and thick skin. There are many shapes and sizes of cacti. Some are short and round; others are tall and thin. Many cactus flowers are big and beautiful. Some bloom at night and are pollinated by moths and bats. Some cactus fruits are brightly coloured and good to eat: many animals eat cactus fruits.

An adaptation is anything that helps a living thing survive and make more of its own kind. Cacti have many adaptations for living in places that are sometimes dry for a long time. At other times these places can get lots of rain.

Cacti can have many small, thin roots near the top of the soil. These roots take in water quickly after a rain. The same cactus may have one long, thick root called a taproot. The taproot grows deep in the soil. It can reach water when the soil on top is dry.

Cacti store water in thick stems. The stems are covered with tough skin, and the skin is covered with wax. The thick waxy skin slows down loss of water. The leaves of cacti are sharp spines (thorns, stickers). Many animals want the water inside the cactus, but the sharp spines and thick skin protect the cactus.

A cactus does not have leaves because it lives in dry places. Leaves transpire, and this can waste water. So, the cactus saves water by having no leaves. The green parts of the cactus are actually its stems. Because the stems are green, they do the photosynthesis for the cactus. They also grow prickly needles to protect the cactus from animals that want to eat it.



The flower of a Moonlight cactus



Many species of cactus have long, sharp spines