

Plant life is abundant in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. There the average rainfall is only about seven inches a year. How have plants learned to survive in these arid, southwestern regions? They have adapted in a variety of ways to this harsh terrain.

Desert plant life does not bloom during phases of drought. If it did, the flowers would wither and die in the remorseless sun. These unique plants are capable of lying dormant for years until it rains. Then once the plants have enough water, flowers quickly mature and bloom.

Most cactus plants have thorns instead of leaves. The surface area of thorns is much smaller than leaves. This reduces the plant's exposure to the parched, hot air. Therefore, not much moisture can evaporate from the vegetation.

The barrel cactus is short and fat. It is shaped like a round accordion. This allows it to expand during rainfall. When water is absorbed through its roots, it gets bigger. As it loses moisture during the dry season, it contracts.

The creosote bush thrives in the desert. It does not grow in bunches because it doesn't like sharing the scarce water. It has an unpleasant, acrid aroma. This smell keeps other flora from growing nearby.

These are ways plant life endures the deserts of the United States.