



Are you good at guessing ages?

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Do you know the age of your native plants? We've all heard that saguaro may be 200 to 300 years old. East of Tucson the largest known specimen has 52 arms, and is believed to weigh about 10 tons. It is estimated that this giant is about 240 years old. Here in the Foothills, the world's tallest saguaro measures 80 feet.

The majestic Sequoia of California, which starts out as a seed weighing only one three-thousandth of an ounce, may end up 270 feet tall and at a weight estimated at 6,200 tons; taking more than 1,000 years to achieve the feat of multiplying 600 billion times in mass.

It is estimated the Joshua tree lives for 200 or 300 years, growing as tall as 30 feet. But did you know a large ocotillo is probably 200 years old? Since it is semi-dormant much of the year, it takes its time growing. Many desert plants spend a great deal of their time resting, and sacrifice large size or fast growth for a measure of security in their environment.

The growth of creosote is normally slow, and its age is difficult to determine, but some probably greatly exceed 100 years. Yet despite its name, the century plant does not live for 100 years; its life span may be seven to 40 years, depending on the species and the amount of water it gets; the plant will die after its one season of bloom. The ephemeral wild flowers grow, of course, bloom, set seed and die in just a few short days or weeks, though a lovely sight while they last.

At Los Coches Creek, near El Cajon, Calif., a prickly pear hedge with three varieties was planted in 1859. That hedge stands strongly today, nearly 70 feet wide.

A giant barrel cactus grown in the University of Arizona gardens for 35 years, was only two feet tall and about 18 inches wide, yet these great

plants grow in the highlands of Central Mexico to 9 feet in height, a single trunk often 4 feet through. In the early 1930s, scientists estimated they attained a weight of 4,000 to 5,000 pounds to an age of 1,000 years. That sounds like a wild over-estimate, yet from a cactus book published in 1973, we find "the giant barrel cactus, although only 9 feet in height, with similar girth and weighing several thousand pounds, may well be 500 or 600 years old."

And finally, the "Old Man Cactus" (*Cephalocereus senilis*), which we see sold locally at 2 or 3 inches can, in its native habitat in Mexico, form columns up to 40 feet high and about 18 inches across. These plants are thought to be about 200 years old.

So, before disturbing or doing away with a native plant, remember, it may be a genuine antique, and deserving of respect for having survived this desert for many more years than you.

*Information on Terry Johnson's
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was deleted*