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Desert bursage plays many roles

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That annoying 'weed' found all over the desert and in your back yard — clumps of untidy bushes with annoying burs, removed by many people to make their yards neat and tidy — what is it?

One definition of a weed is "a plant which is out of place."

This hardly seems applicable to this supremely adapted desert plant. The bursage puts out leaves only after rains and drops them when dryness returns — nature's way of preventing any waste of precious moisture through transpiration.

It also acts as a nursery for cacti; cactus seeds, seedlings and young plants, protecting them against the elements and animals and provides shelter, shade and moisture.

The bursage is also a major food source for the kangaroo rat (that desert dweller who is also perfectly adapted to its environment; and is described by Joseph Kruth as the "mouse that never drinks").

In comparatively dry years, this plant's buds provide the Vitamin A essential for the nesting success of quail.

Perhaps more important to us human beings needing to adjust to desert living, or living with the desert, the bursage prevents ero-

sion and holds moisture, thus modifying the temperature and provides energy savings in our long, hot desert summer.

It also stops reflection of heat from the bare ground and keeps the dust down.

Finally, man can help keep the delicate balance of nature on our fragile desert by leaving this very

useful plant in the ground, which is so necessary for desert birds and animals to survive.