

# ALL ABOUT SUCCULENTS

By Rosario Douglas

January, 2019

## *Stenocereus thurberi*, the Organ Pipe Cactus

Modified from a February, 2017 article (by the same author) in *The Offset*, a newsletter of the Central Oklahoma Cactus&Succulent Society.



Organ Pipe cactus (*Stenocereus thurberi*) is a Sonoran desert cacti found in the US and Mexico. This is the second largest cactus in the US, Saguaro cacti being the largest.

Its characteristic shape, consisting of numerous long and narrow arms (the stems are about 6 inches thick) that arise from a single stem, low at the base, reminded earlier settlers of a pipe organ, hence the name. In Spanish the cactus is called **Pitaya dulce** (sweet fruit).

In the US this cactus is only found in the area comprising Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in southern Arizona, next to the USA-Mexico Border.

Two subspecies are recognized, the larger subspecies found in the US (between 16 and 26 feet high) and mainland Mexico (in the state of Sonora) is variety *thurberi*. The more compact plant, (no larger than 10 feet high) is found in Baja California Sur – Mexico and is the variety *Stenocereus thurberi littoralis*.

A slow grower, this cactus is often found in rocky areas up to 3000 feet and it is sensitive to frost, which explains why it is not found in the Tucson area but present at lower and warmer elevations only 150 miles to the West in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Some reports estimate that it takes up to 150 years for the plant to reach maturity.



**A.** *Stenocereus thurberi thurberi* (Organ Pipe cactus). Photographed at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument photo by Mike Douglas.

**B.** Organ Pipe cactus flower. Wikipedia Commons.



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Like Saguaros, Organ Pipe cacti, need “Nurse Plants” during the early stages of their lives. Nurse plants provide much-needed shade during the hot hours of the day during summer. Thus you will find young specimens growing under the protective shade of Palo Verdes and Desert Ironwood. Source: Wikipedia



A. The fruit of the Organ Pipe cacti. Taken from: From the blog EthnoHerbalist at: <http://www.ethnoherbalist.com/southern-california-native-plants-medicinal/pitaya-fruit/>

D. Organ Pipe cacti growing with Saguaros at Organ Pipe National Monument in Arizona. Photo by Mike Douglas.

