

**DRAWING FROM NATURE**  
**Science and Art Lessons for Kids**  
Los Angeles Times Kids' Reading Room Page



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Special to the Times

June 21, 2002

Today is the first day of summer. That means the temperature in Southern California is getting hot. If you were a plant, what kind would you want to be? A cactus, which is a type of succulent, would be a good choice because its stem acts like a water storage tank.

Cacti (the plural of cactus) have tough waxy skin, sharp spines and soft hair. They have bright, colorful and showy flowers that often last only one day, and they produce fruit. There are about 1,800 species of cacti. They grow in many shapes and sizes and can be found in the hot and dry sections of South, Central and North America.

Humans use cacti for food, water, medicines, building materials, tools and decorations. Animals also use cacti for food, water and shelter.

All plants have a common name and a botanical name. For example, the common name for one species of prickly pear cactus is "bunny ears." Its botanical name is *Opuntia microdasys*. The common names for other species of prickly pear include "beavertail," "porcupine" and "pancake." Can you imagine what they might look like?

*\* Illustration by Ursula, age 12.*