



MOJAVE DESERT NATIVE PLANTS

CREOSOTE BUSH

Larrea tridentata

One of the most dominant shrubs in American deserts, the Creosote Bush is found below 4000 feet (1220 m). A mature plant can reach a height of 12 feet (3.6 m) or more. It is also one of the most drought-tolerant of desert plants.

Waxy dark green leaves shrivel and drop off during periods of drought, but green leaves quickly return with sufficient rainfall. Roots can spread 20 feet or more in search of moisture. With rain, the plant gives off a pungent fragrance. Yellow flowers generally appear during April or May, but creosote may show flowers at any time depending on rainfall.

The age of a single plant may reach 500 years or more, but as a single plant dies, new stems are generated from an underground crown to form a ring of single plants. As individual plants die the ring of



“clones” grows larger; it can reach more than 60 feet in diameter and may be as old as 11,500 years.

Commonly called the medicine cabinet for the desert Native Americans, the leaves and stems were boiled for a healthful tea that was used to find relief for a number of ailments including colds, stomach cramps, and bowel problems, to name just a few. Steam from the boiling process was inhaled for the relief of lung congestion and intestinal complaints. Crushed leaves were used as a healing agent for sores and open wounds.