



Eagle Claw Cactus



Tree Cholla



Prickly Pear Cactus



Fishhook Cactus



Claret Cup Cactus



Prickly Pear and Friend

Cactus Capital of Texas



Texas Rainbow Cactus

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Cactus Capital of Texas

For Sanderson and Terrell County, the official title "Cactus Capital of Texas," is actually a very fitting declaration. Although Texas and the Great Southwest are areas filled with many types of cacti, the geological location of Sanderson and Terrell County places it squarely in a convergent zone between the Chihuahuan Desert, the Edwards Plateau, the southern Great Plains, and to a lesser extent the thorn-scrub of the Rio Grande Valley and the Apachean floristic region of southeastern Arizona. In this area one can find cacti representative of those great ecological biomes.

The Chihuahuan Desert stretches from the interior of Mexico on the south to the Trans Pecos of Texas and New Mexico on the north, and from the Edwards Plateau on the east to the Sonora Desert on the west. It hosts a unique flora of myriad species of cacti, and many kinds of desert shrubs, grasses and trees. Far from being stereotypical Saharan sand dunes (although those are present in some areas) or vacant, blasted hardpan, the Chihuahuan habitats are overflowing with life.

Arid mountain ranges loom up, sprinkled with dwarf forests of piñon pine, punctuating the horizon and framing the dry, alluvial plains. Arroyos and canyons cut through the landscape, providing escape for the infrequent rains. Though dry for most of the year, the desert blooms when Pacific and Gulf hurricane systems drive far inland and bring monsoonal relief to a thirsty land.

At the eastern boundary of the Chihuahua, where Sanderson and Terrell County live, the desert comes crashing to a halt with the vast uplift of the Edwards Plateau. Geological forces have raised that huge area far above the plain, and erosion forces are gradually bringing it back under control. Flat-topped mesas separated by deep canyons provide a different habitat for cacti, plants and animals.

Though the 11" annual rainfall is about the same as the Chihuahua, the canyons, outcroppings and limestone soils retain the moisture and create a more humid environment. Mosses, ferns and lichens grow freely in the shadow of limestone boulders and canyon walls. Forests of sotol, a type of yucca plant, cover the hills and valleys. The omnipresent prickly pear cactus, in all its variations, grows so profusely that travel by foot or horseback in some places is almost impossible. An old adage in West Texas that everything here "bites, stings or sticks" is quite true in this area.

But go a little way to the north and the rugged hills begin to relax, becoming the southern reaches of the Great Plains. Here begins another habitat for different cacti which don't grow in the canyons or in the Chihuahua. Dry, hilly landscapes turn into vast prairies of short and tall grasses and...cacti. Prickly pear, in some form or another, grows all the way into Canada.

So, the moniker "Cactus Capital of Texas" is a fitting term for Sanderson and Terrell County, Texas. With no need for hyperbole or exaggeration, there is no other region in the USA that hosts such diverse, overlapping populations of cacti in all their spiny glory.

All places boast of being special, but the environs of Sanderson and Terrell County are truly unique and worthy of pride. Plentiful and diverse flora, abundant fauna, sweeping vistas and warm, outgoing people make this a great place to visit and a wonderful place to live.

Terrell County Cacti Check List

- Ariocarpus fissuratus* (Living Rock Cactus)
- Coryphantha echinus* (Sea-urchin Cactus)
- Coryphantha macromeris* (Big-needle Pincushion Cactus)
- Coryphantha ramillosa* (Whiskerbrush Pincushion Cactus)
- Coryphantha sneedi* (Sneed's Pincushion Cactus)
- Coryphantha tuberculosa* (Cob Cactus)
- Coryphantha vivipara* (Beehive Cactus)
- Echinocactus horizontalonius* (Eagle Claw/Devil's Head)
- Echinocactus texensis* (Horse-crippler)
- Echinocereus coccineus* (Claret-cup Cactus)
- Echinocereus dasyacanthus* (Texas Rainbow Cactus)
- Echinocereus ennaecanthus* (Strawberry Cactus)
- Echinocereus pectinatus* (Rainbow Cactus)
- Echinocereus reichenbachii* (Lace Cactus)
- Echinocereus stramineus* (Organo Strawberry Cactus)
- Echinomastus mariposensis* (Mariposa Cactus)
- Epithelantha micromeris* (Small-flowered Button Cactus)
- Ferocactus hamatacanthus* (Turk's Barrel Cactus)
- Glandulicactus uncinatus* (Cat-claw Cactus)
- Lophophora williamsii* (Peyote)
- Mammillaria heyderi* (Heyder's Pincushion Cactus)
- Mammillaria lasiacantha* (Golf Ball Cactus)
- Neolloydia conoidea* (Texas Cone Cactus)
- Opuntia (Cylandropuntia) imbricata* (Tree Cholla)
- Opuntia (Cylandropuntia) kleiniae* (Candle Cholla)
- Opuntia (Cylandropuntia) leptocaulis* (Christmas Cholla)
- Opuntia (Grusonia) schottii* (Common Dog Cholla)
- Opuntia atrispina* (Black and Yellow-spined Prickly Pear)
- Opuntia camanchica* (Comanche Prickly Pear)
- Opuntia engelmanni* (Texas Prickly Pear)
- Opuntia mackensenii* (Mackensen's Prickly Pear)
- Opuntia strigil* (Marble Fruit Prickly Pear)
- Opuntia tortispina* (Twisted-spined Plains Prickly Pear)
- Peniocereus greggii* (Queen-of-the-Night)