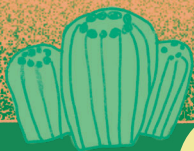
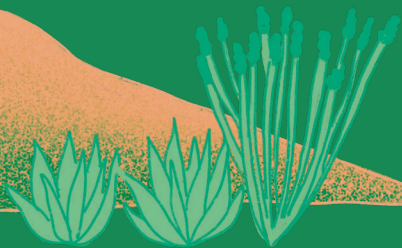


A



Garden

for



Oasis



A Guide to Gardening with
Native Plants in the Valley

Gardening in Oasis

Here in the Eastern Coachella Valley plants and animals have learned to thrive in the desert! Our home is full of wonders, from the gentle rustle of mesquite trees to the fluttering wings of monarch butterflies. Here in Oasis, we have a special job: to be desert stewards. That means caring for our environment so it stays healthy and beautiful for everyone.

This little book is your guide to bringing nature into your home! Inside, you'll discover fun ways to help the desert, create lovely spaces in your neighborhood, and celebrate everything that makes Oasis a strong and special place to live.

This guide was made with care and support from the California Transportation Department, Riverside University Health System, Kounkuey Design Initiative, the Oasis Leadership Committee, and the Juntos youth group.



Talking to the Community

Before creating this guide, we talked to the community of Oasis about what they would like to see in their outdoor spaces! Many residents said they would love more shade, like trees and shade structures, to help stay cool in the desert heat. Others suggested walking paths lined with trees and native plants because they're not only beautiful but also makes everyone healthier.

People also shared their wish for places where families can gather, share meals, and spend time together. They thought colorful flowers and water features, like ponds or fountains, would make these areas even more inviting and bring butterflies and birds. Most importantly, everyone agreed on using native plants and conserving water so these spaces are sustainable and last a long time. Just like the desert plants and animals have learned to thrive in Oasis so has this resilient community.

How to Read this Guide

We listened to the community and turned them into six themes:

1. Spending time with family,
2. staying cool,
3. enjoying colorful flowers,
4. sharing meals,
5. being with animals,
6. and saving water.

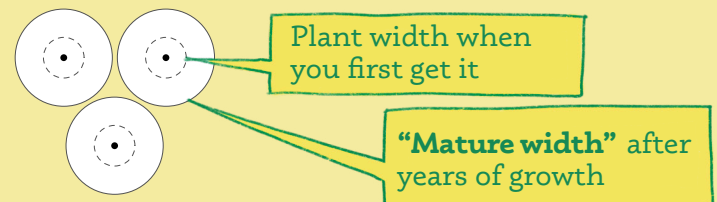
From these themes, we created six gardens you can make at home or in your community! Each garden has a list of plants, a suggested layout, and some tips. You can follow the layout, use a part of it or make one of your own! Use this little book as an introduction to native plants but remember, to grow as a gardener, keep learning and asking questions! These plants are not just in the ground—they are a part of your community too!

Some things to think about:



These plants can also grow happily in pots if you don't have access to soil! It's a great way to bring nature into small spaces, like balconies or patios.

- The plants you see here are mostly blooming, but like all plants in nature, they change throughout the year. Their leaves, flowers, and even their size will look different as the seasons go by!
- Plants in gardens often grow bigger than they would in the wild, so keep that in mind when planting. If you plant them too close together, they might not have enough room to grow big. A general rule of thumb is to space plants according to their expected width at maturity. A shrub with a **“mature width”** of 6 feet should be planted at least 6 feet on-center away from its neighboring shrubs' central trunk. You can look up a plant's mature width on www.calscape.org. We recommend looking up more information on each species to better understand their individual needs. This will help you take the best care of them!



The Environment of Oasis

The Coachella Valley is one of the most beautiful landscapes in California, and is home to thousands of plant and animal species—27 of which are endangered—that are specifically adapted to the climate and conditions here. There is even a plant here called the Mecca-aster (*Xylorhiza cognata*) that is 'endemic' to the valley, which means that it is found nowhere else in the world.

As agriculture and development have grown in the valley, there are fewer and fewer places for these plants and animals to live, which is why it is important to find ways of bringing the natural environment into all spaces in the community.

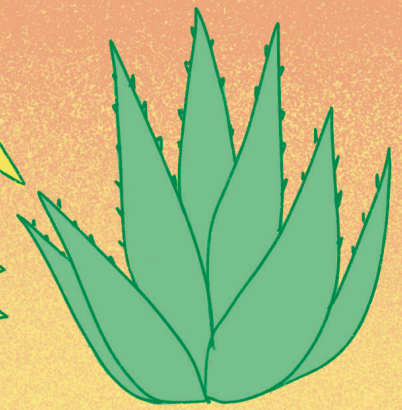
Native Plant Adaptations

A 'native' plant is a plant that has evolved naturally in a specific region or ecosystem over hundreds or thousands of years. In the Coachella Valley, native plants have adapted to survive with little water—in fact, that's why so many plants here have small leaves, so they don't lose as much water to the sun! Many plants also go dormant for long periods of time, blooming only when it rains. Native plants also help to stabilize the soil, which helps minimize dust during wind storms.

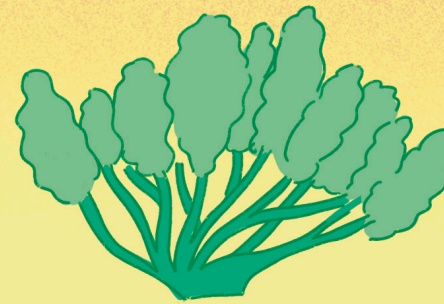
There are a lot of native plant species that you can easily grow at home, and the next pages give you tips on how to do that!

Leaf succulence: Stores water in its thick, fleshy stems

Photosynthesis adaptations (CAM photosynthesis): Opens their stomata at night to take in CO₂, reducing water loss during the hot daytime hours

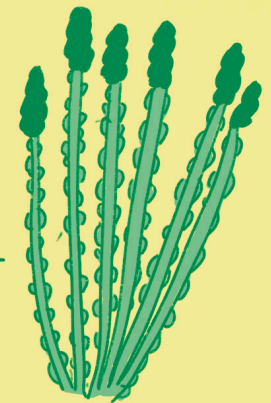


Desert Agave



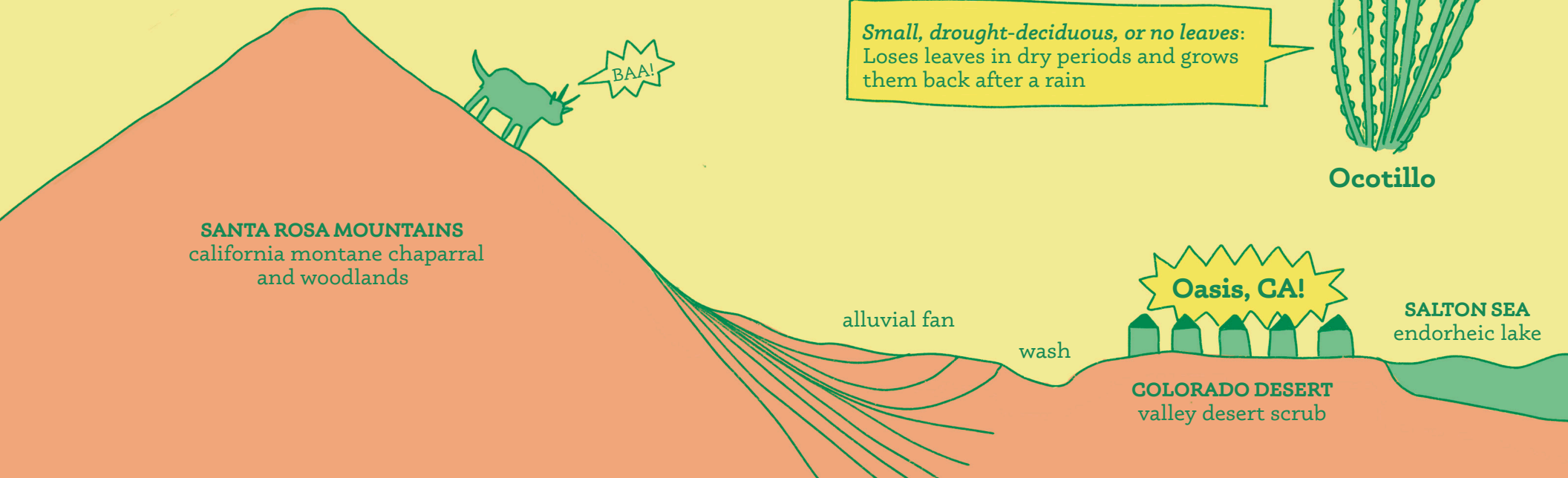
Creosote Bush

Small, drought-deciduous leaves: A smaller leaf size to minimize water loss through transpiration



Ocotillo

Small, drought-deciduous, or no leaves: Loses leaves in dry periods and grows them back after a rain



SANTA ROSA MOUNTAINS
california montane chaparral
and woodlands

alluvial fan

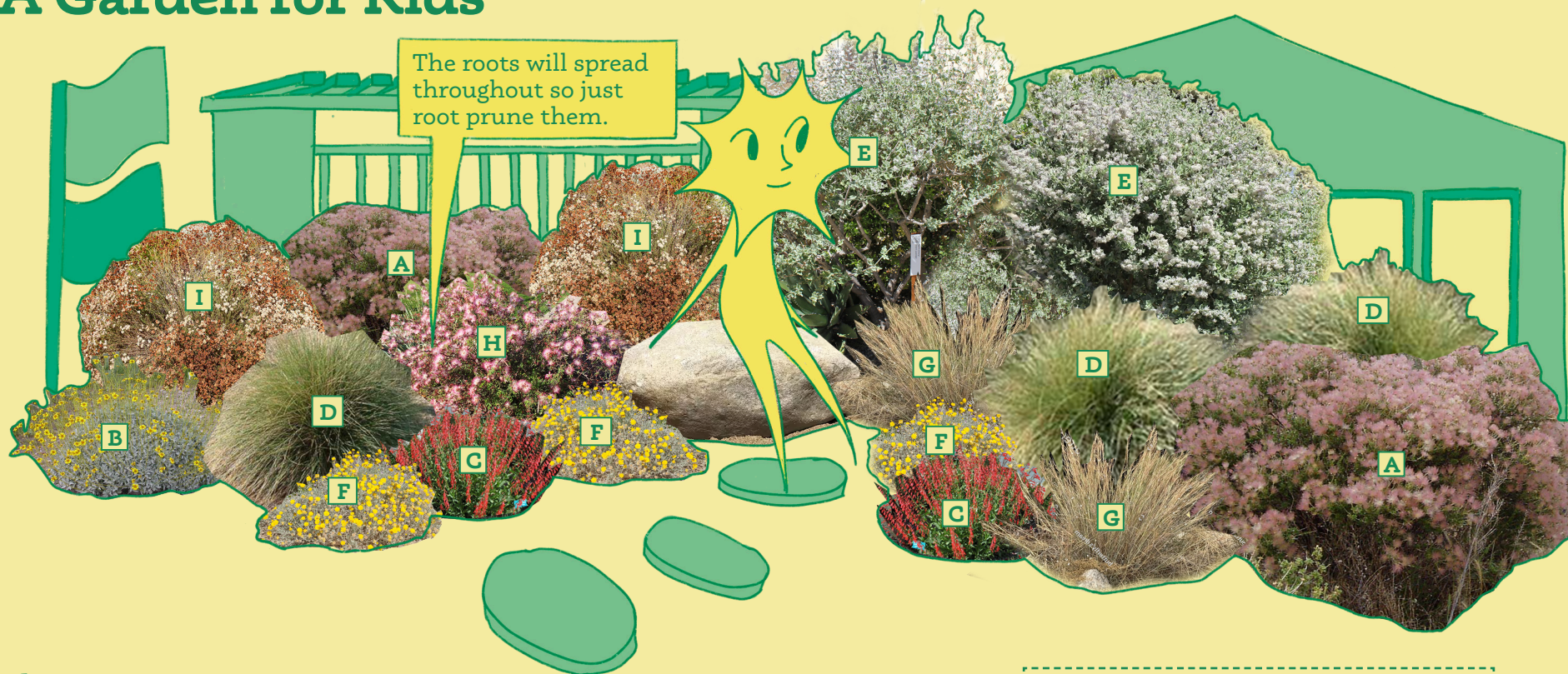
wash

Oasis, CA!

COLORADO DESERT
valley desert scrub

SALTON SEA
endorheic lake

A Garden for Kids



Plant List

A Apache Plume
(*Fallugia paradoxa*)


B Brittlebush
(*Encelia Farinosa*)

C Firecracker Penstemon
(*Penstemon eatonii*)


D Deer Grass
(*Muhlenbergia rigens*)

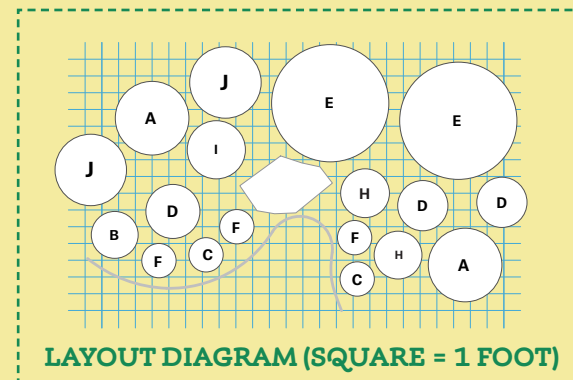
E Desert Lavender
(*Hyptis emoryi*)

F Desert Marigold
(*Baileya multiradiata*)

G Desert Needle Grass
(*Stipa speciosa*) 

H Fairy Duster
(*Calliandra eriophylla*)

I Wild Buckwheat
(*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) 



When designing a kid-friendly garden, safety should come first by choosing plants that are non-toxic and free of thorns or sharp edges. Soft materials like sand or mulch help create a safe environment for play. But it's equally important to make the space fun and engaging, encouraging children to touch, smell, and explore plants as they learn through hands-on discovery.

A Garden to Cool Down



Plant List

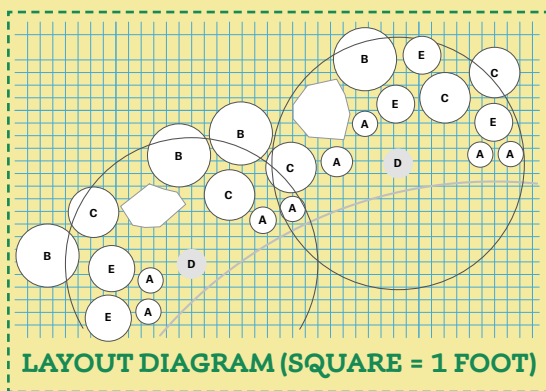
A Firecracker Penstemon
(*Penstemon eatonii*)

B White Sage
(*Salvia apania*)

C Deer Grass
(*Muhlenbergia rigens*)

D Blue Palo Verde
(*Parkinsonia florida*)

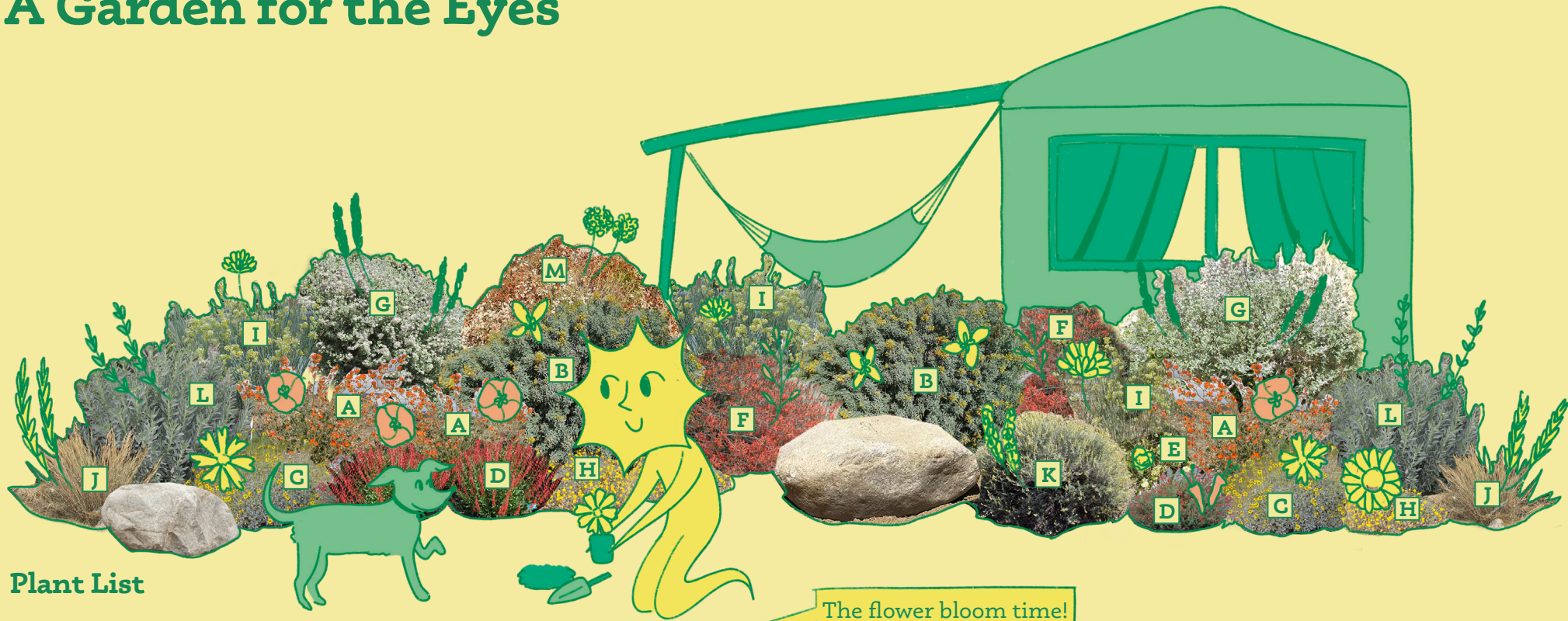
E Sticky Monkey Flower
(*Diplacus aurantiacus*)




Designing a cooling garden in the Coachella Valley involves selecting plants and materials that reduce temperatures through shading and evapotranspiration.

A multi-layered canopy of trees, shrubs, and groundcovers creates shaded microclimates that cool the air throughout the day. Grouping plants closely enhances their collective cooling effect, while thoughtful placement allows natural air movement to circulate cooler air across the garden.

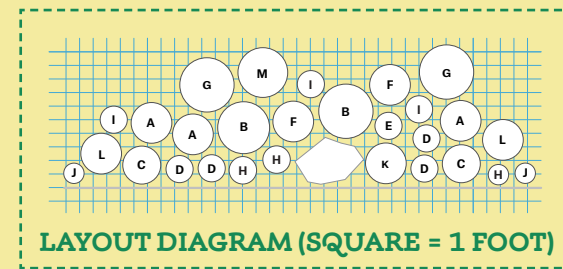
A Garden for the Eyes



Plant List

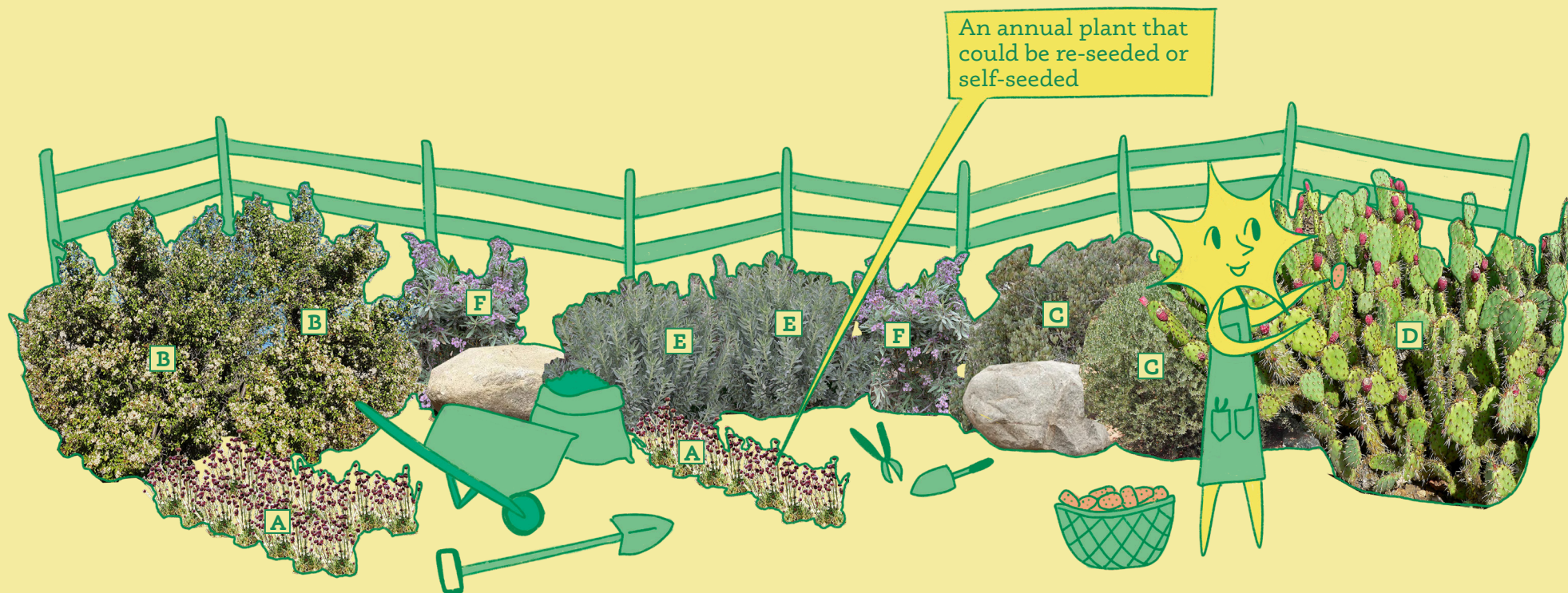
A Apricot Mallow (Mar-Jul) <i>(Sphaeralcea ambigua)</i>	H Desert Marigold (Apr-Oct) <i>(Baileya multiradiata)</i>
B Bladderpod (Jan-Dec) <i>(Peritoma arborea)</i>	I Desert Milkweed (Mar-Nov) 
C Brittlebush (Jan-Aug) 	J Desert Needle Grass <i>(Stipa speciosa)</i>
D Firecracker Penstemon <i>(Penstemon eatonii)</i>	K White Bursage (Feb-Dec) <i>(Ambrosia dumosa)</i>
E Cheesebush (Mar-Jul) <i>(Ambrosia salsola)</i>	L White Sage (Apr-Jul) 
F Chuparosa (Mar-Oct) 	M Wild Buckwheat (Jun-Oct) 
G Desert Lavender (Jan-Aug) <i>(Condea emoryi)</i>	

The flower bloom time!



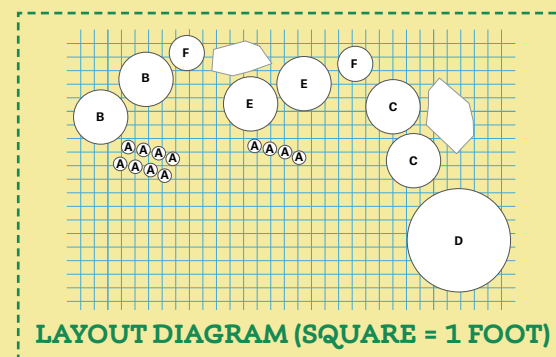
To design a garden that blooms year-round with bright colors in the Coachella Valley, select hardy, drought-tolerant plants that thrive in the desert and bloom in different seasons. Group plants with overlapping bloom times to keep the garden colorful throughout the year. Arrange taller plants in the back, medium-sized ones in the middle, and groundcovers in the front to create layers of vibrant color.

A Garden for Nourishment



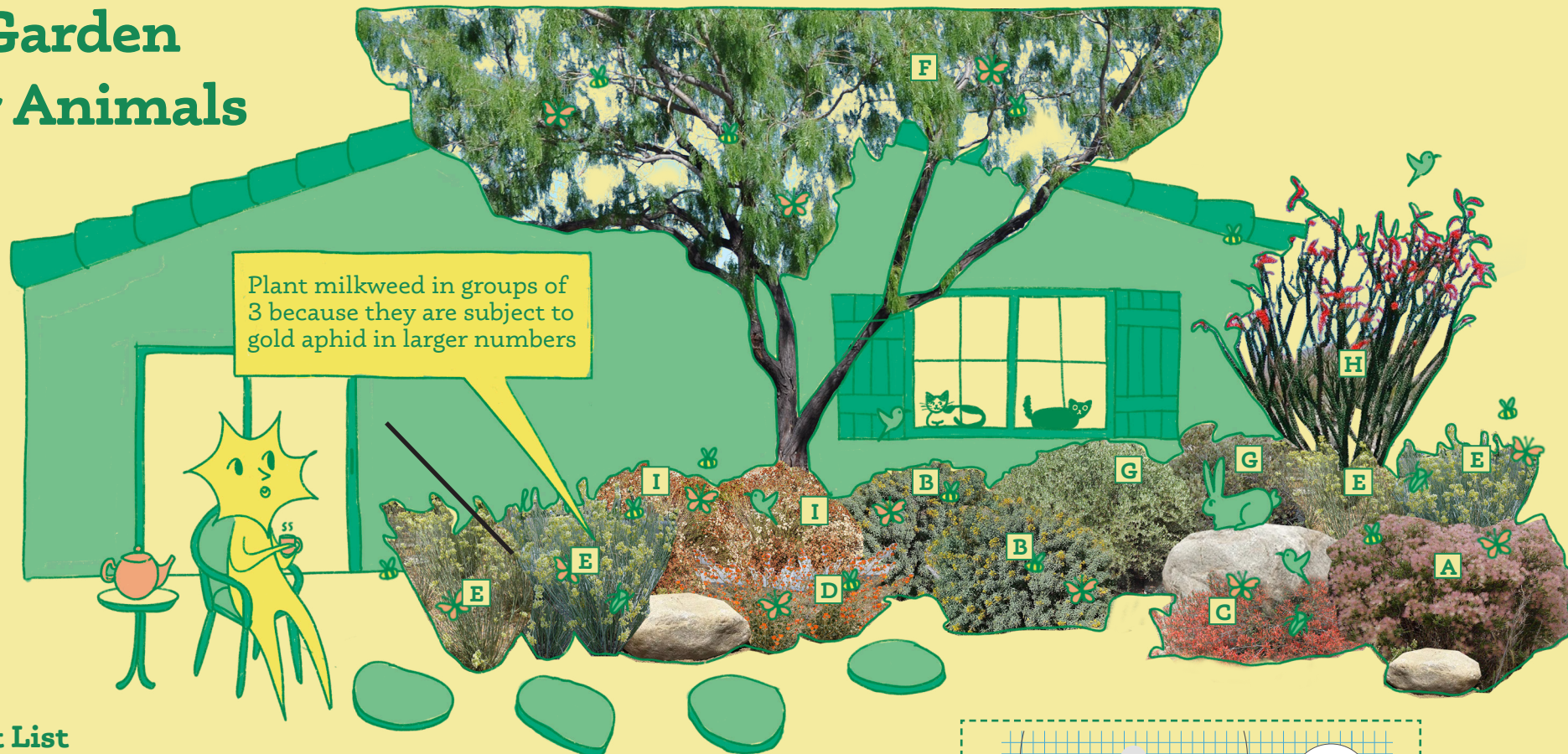
Plant List

- A **Chia**
(Salvia hispanica) Seeds are high in omega-3s and can be used in drinks, salads, yogurts etc.
- B **Desert Peach**
(Prunus fasciculata) The fruits are edible and sour. They can be dried or made into preserves.
- C **Jojoba**
(Simmondsia chinensis) The oil extracted from its seeds is used for skin and hair care.
- D **Engelmann Prickly Pear** *(Opuntia engelmannii)* The pads (nopales) and fruit (tunas) are edible.
- E **White Sage** *(Salvia apiana)* It has antimicrobial properties and can be brewed as tea for sore throats.
- F **Yerba Santa**
(Eriodictyon crassifolium) Traditionally used to treat respiratory ailments like coughs and colds.
























Designing a garden that incorporates native edible and medicinal plants can be a way to learn about the natural heritage of the Coachella Valley while creating a space that serves multiple purposes. Organize the garden into sections based on plant uses, such as areas dedicated to edible, medicinal, and crafting plants, to create a purposeful and educational landscape.






A Garden for Animals

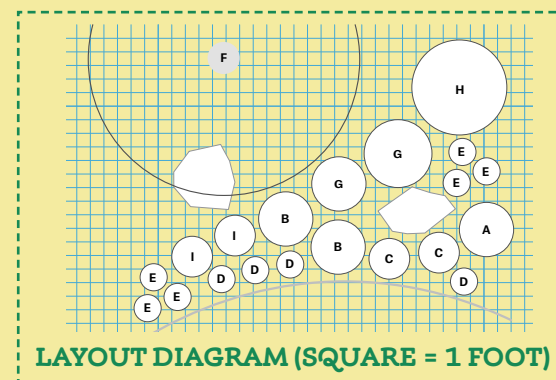


Plant milkweed in groups of 3 because they are subject to gold aphid in larger numbers

Plant List

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A Apache Plume  
<i>(Fallugia paradoxa)</i> | F Honey Mesquite  
<i>(Prosopis glandulosa)</i> |
| B Bladderpod   
<i>(Peritoma arborea)</i> | G Jojoba  
<i>(Simmondsia chinensis)</i> |
| C Chuparosa   
<i>(Justicia californica)</i> | H Ocotillo  
<i>(Fouquieria splendens)</i> |
| D Desert Globemallow  
<i>(Sphaeralcea ambigua)</i> | I Wild Buckwheat   
<i>(Eriogonum fasciculatum)</i> |
| E Desert Milkweed  
<i>(Asclepias subulata)</i> | |

 hummingbirds  butterfly  beetles  bees  rabbits



Designing a garden with native plants to attract and support pollinators, birds, and other wildlife helps strengthen the local ecosystem and fosters a connection with nature. Include plants of different heights to provide shelter, nesting sites, and protection for wildlife. Select plants that bloom and produce seeds or fruit at different times of the year to offer a continuous food source.

A Garden to Really Conserve Water



Plant List

A California Barrel Cactus
(*Ferocactus cylindraceus*)

E Mojave Yucca
(*Yucca schidigera*)

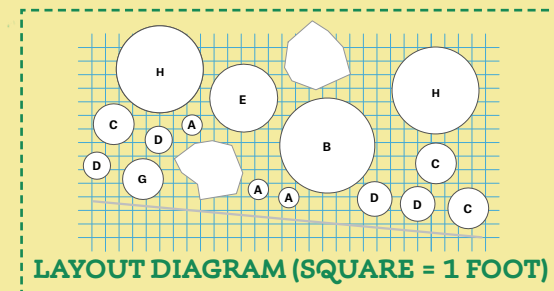
B Creosote Bush
(*Larrea tridentata*)

F Ocotillo
(*Fouquieria splendens*)

C Desert Agave 
(*Agave deserti*)

G White Bursage
(*Ambrosia dumosa*)

D Desert Globemallow
(*Sphaeralcea ambigua*)











If water usage and maintenance are priorities for you, incorporating plants that require little to no water is an excellent choice for your garden. Nearly all plants native to the Coachella Valley are adapted to thrive with minimal water due to the region's climate, but these particular plants are exceptionally resilient and low-maintenance.

Taking Care of your Native Plants

When to Plant

Fall and early winter are the best times to plant native plants because this allows them to develop strong root systems and gather energy before the growing season begins.

How to Plant

-  Dig a hole slightly larger than the root ball, with irregular sides to help the roots spread. Make the hole as deep as the root ball, but no deeper.
-  Fill the hole with water before placing the plant to ensure it drains properly. Wait for the water to soak in.
-  Gently remove the plant from its container, holding the root ball.
-  Place the plant in the hole so the top of the root ball (where the stem meets the roots) sits about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch above the surrounding soil.
-  Use the soil you dug out to fill the hole, tamping it gently to avoid damaging the roots.
-  Add water as you fill, or water the plant thoroughly once the hole is filled.
-  If there's extra soil, mound it around the base of the plant to create a small berm. This will help retain water.
-  Water the root ball and surrounding area well after planting.

How to Think About Soils and Fertilizer

Native plants usually thrive without the need for fertilizer, and may even react poorly to it. Desert plants, in particular, are adapted to low-nutrient sandy soils, so adding compost or fertilizer is not necessary. Instead of using organic mulches like bark, consider using inorganic mulches such as rocks or gravel. Mulching helps retain moisture and keeps weeds at bay.

When and How to Water


After around 2-5 years native plants can thrive with very little to no watering. However, newly planted species need more attention to ensure their roots grow strong. It is better to water deeply to encourage strong root systems, meaning pouring more water less infrequently. A basic watering schedule:

Weeks 1-2  **Summer:** Water every 1-2 days
Fall-Spring: Water every 3-4 days

Weeks 3-4  **Summer:** Water every 3-4 days
Fall-Spring: Water every 6-7 days

Weeks 5-6  **Summer:** Water every 4-6 days
Fall-Spring: Water every 7-10 days

Weeks 7-8  **Summer:** Water every 7 days
Fall-Spring: Water every 10-14 days

Weeks 8+  After the first summer you can water once a week and once established you can water twice a month.

Keep an eye out for the weather and check the soil moisture!

Where Do I Find Native Plants?

Ever wondered why native plants are so rare in nurseries? Native plants can be tough to find in nurseries because they're not as in demand as ornamental species. With fewer people seeking them out, nurseries are less likely to stock them. Most nurseries cater to customers looking for fast-growing plants that bloom year-round, while the beauty of native desert plants takes a little more patience and a deeper appreciation for their unique adaptations. But native desert plants march to a different beat—they're tough, beautiful in their own ways, and perfectly adapted to the Coachella Valley. In the long run, they're budget-friendly because they require minimal maintenance and use less water.

Thankfully, a few nurseries and organizations are working to promote native plants, grow them locally, and educate the public about their incredible benefits. You can also find occasional native plants at certain nurseries. Check out these resources to bring a bit of the desert's magic into your own garden!

Local Nurseries With Native Plants

Desert Straw House Native Plant Nursery
16300 Bennett Rd, Sky Valley, CA 92241

GDNC Cactus & Desert Plant Nursery
17655 Zeta Rd
Desert Hot Springs, CA 92241

Cactus Mart
49889 29 Palms Hwy, Morongo Valley, CA 92256

High County Nursery
38460 Bailiff Rd, Anza, CA 92539

Bob Williams Nursery Inc.
48575 Madison St, Indio, CA 92201

Moller's Garden Center
72-235 Painters Path, Palm Desert, CA 92260

Native Plant Resources:

The Living Desert and Gardens
www.livingdesert.org/zoo-news/gardens/native-plant-guide

Mojave Desert Land Trust
www.mdlt.org

Theodore Payne Foundation
www.theodorepayne.org

Calscape
www.calscape.org



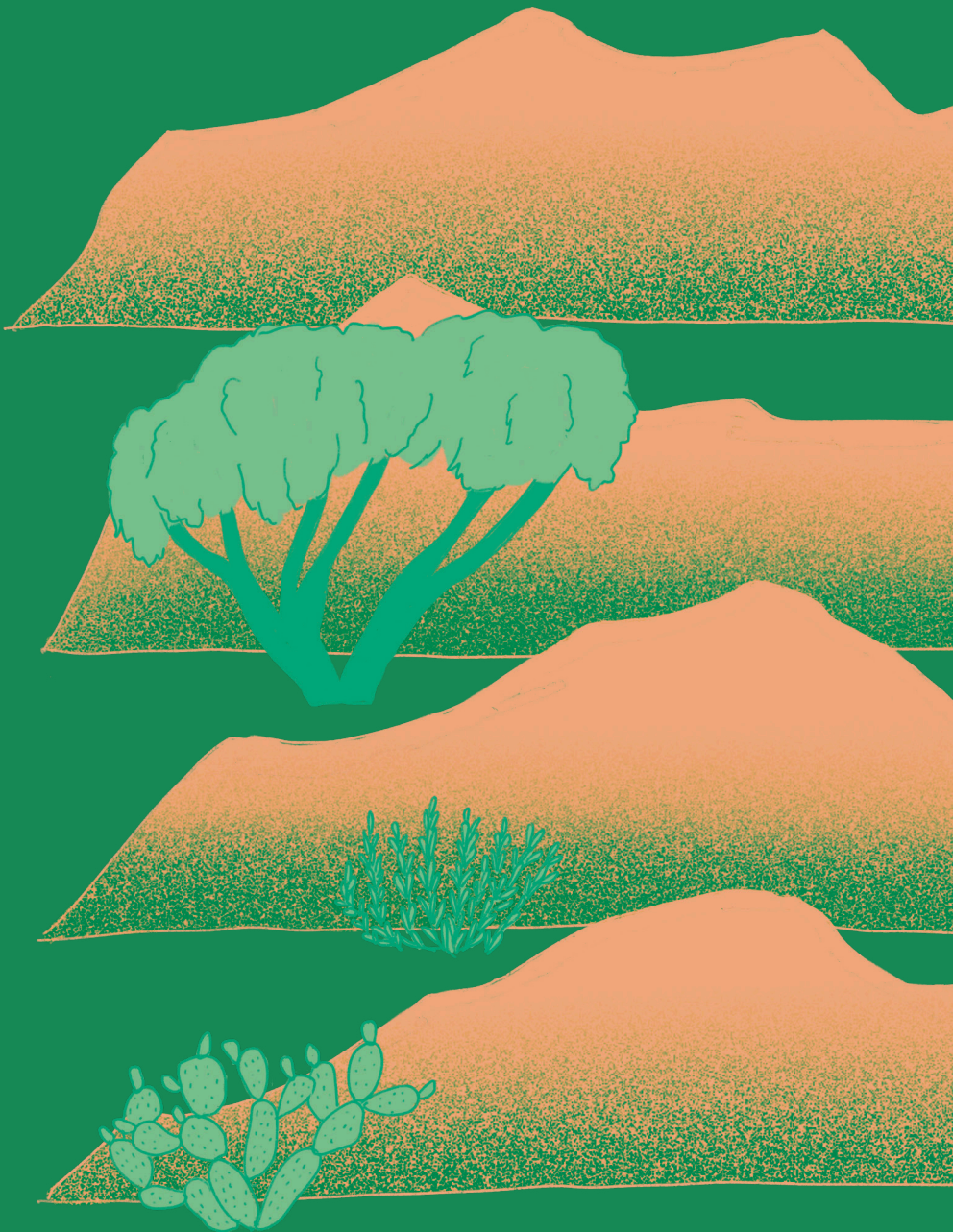
Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), a community development non-profit, has been working in the Eastern Coachella Valley for over 10 years. In addition to helping build new parks and many equity driven Plans, KDI helped form the **Juntos al Aire Libre** youth group and the **Oasis Leadership Committee**, an organized group of residents from Oasis. Both groups are advocates around EJ issues in their community.

Formed in 2022, the **Juntos al Aire Libre** is an EJ focused youth program that supports building leadership capacity for College of the Desert Students as they embark in their academic journey. The program goal is to inspire and uplift the EJ champions of the future.

Formed in 2019, the **Oasis Leadership Committee (OLC)** is a 16 resident strong community based organization that has been championing EJ topics in their community. These residents have been involved in the creation of a local mobility plan, the design of the first community park in Oasis, addressing extreme heat through shade planning and making Oasis more climate change resilient.

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens has been a beloved institution in Southern California for over 50 years. An Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited zoo and botanical garden, The Living Desert represents the desert environments of North America, Australia, and Africa with more than 150 species, 1,200 protected acres, and miles of hiking trails





Produced by KDI with the help of The Living Desert, Oasis Leadership Committee, and the Juntos youth group