

Cactus Rescue Crew Program



Introduction . . .

In 1999 five Tucson Cactus & Succulent Society (TCSS) members took the initiative to start a salvage program to save desirable native cacti before they are destroyed by grading for new development, or new roads.

This Cactus Rescue Crew initiative is helping meet the increasing demand for native plants in Southern Arizona. The developer is required by law to save some of the larger native trees and cacti for future replanting in the development. There are usually hundreds if not thousands of smaller saguaros, barrels, ocotillo, hedgehogs, pincushions, and other cacti that are not economically viable to relocate and will end up in a land fill or as desert mulch if not rescued.

Since the start of our Cactus Rescue Crew Program, over 44,000 cacti have been rescued and made available at very reasonable prices. Rescued cacti find various homes throughout Southern Arizona, at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, the Tucson Botanical Gardens, public buildings, nurseries, club members homes, and other homes throughout the Southwest.

The most critical step of a rescue program is to get in contact with the land owner or developer early-on when they apply for a grading permit and before any machinery is brought on to the property. Several steps are required by the rescue crew coordinator to start the rescue process once a developer agrees to allow cactus and succulents other than those required by Arizona's Native Plant Protection Ordinances (NPPO) to be saved.

Initiating a Rescue . . .

Knowledgeable Cactus Rescue crew members will complete a walking survey of the area where plants are to be removed to identify the types and quantity that are available for removal. It is important we stay within marked grading limits or if not marked to use project maps to be sure only areas that are to be graded are inventoried and any washes or save areas are noted. We often work from the developers NPPO survey maps and lists.

An Arizona Department of Agriculture - Protected Native Plants Removal Application is filled out with legal descriptions, name of the developer and organization to remove the plants and the cactus inventory listed. The landowner or agent signs the form which is then filed with the State to authorize the removal of the protected plants.

We obtain a Native Plant Removal and Transportation Permit along with plant tags for each native cactus to be removed and transported. It is illegal to transport native plants which were growing in their original location without proper permits and tags.

Only active club members may volunteer for the Cactus Rescue Crew due to insurance and liability reasons. Each member is notified by Email a few days in advance of the rescue operation and is given rescue specifics.

Weekends are almost always chosen because many of the crew members work regular jobs during the week. And, by rescuing on a weekend we also stay out of the way of any equipment and construction activity.

Rescue Process . . .

Crew members show up on site early in the morning armed with picks, shovels, gloves, hats, water, boxes, and wheel barrows. They sign in (liability waiver), are given safety instructions, and are instructed as to types of cacti to be removed and what areas may be rescued. Small maps are often provided to each Crew Member with rescue details.

After the rescue crew has dug plants for several hours it is time to move all the plants to a central work area in the field to sort and tag all the plants and share educational information. Each native cactus must have an official State of Arizona Native Plant Tag attached to it by using a string with the adhesive backed tag folded over the knot. It is illegal to transport any native plant from the property until each one is properly tagged.

More Information . . .

Visit our web site: www.TucsonCactus.org
Click on “Cactus Rescue” for more information about this program and the availability of rescued plants. You can Email us at: CactusRescue@TucsonCactus.org

We are a non-profit 501(c)3 educational organization. Cactus removed from your site may be considered a donation, consult your tax advisor for advice.

Contacts:

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New Homes for Rescued Cacti . . .

Rescue crew members have first choice for some of plants they rescue. They only pay actual club costs if they take them with them from the site. This is a great incentive to help with the rescues and get that special cactus for your landscape.

Cacti that are not taken by Crew Members are loaded into trucks and trailers and moved to a temporary holding area. They are planted in soil with good drainage for holding and care until the next sale. The rescued plants are sold mainly at public sales held at our holding site near Wetmore and First Ave. Our mailing lists and web site are used to announce sale dates which vary due to cactus availability. We normally hold about five sales per year. Sometimes a special sale is held to make the plants available for a neighborhood where the cacti were rescued which keeps them in their native area.

Please note that TCSS does not rescue or remove cacti from private residences.

Educational Brochures . . .

The Rescue Crew has prepared special brochures to be given to each customer to assist with the planting and care of their new bare rooted plants. These brochures, available for printing from our Web site, include one for barrels/hedgehogs/saguaros and one just for ocotillo since they require different care.

Shade cloth squares or brush cuttings that block about 30 percent of the sunlight can be used to give cacti extra protection from summer sun for several months while they get reestablished.

Rescue Profits . . .

Profits from the sale of our Rescued cacti are used for Educational Outreach including school grants, student cash prizes for worthy Southern Arizona Science Fair projects (K to 12), educational brochures, and also used for club activities. In May of 2002 TCSS created the School Grant Program. The objective is to provide funds for K to 12 school teachers so that they have a means to help expand knowledge and understanding about cactus and succulents to their students and community. The Science Fair awards were started in 2004 and we have seen some excellent projects which we feature in our newsletter, conferences and exhibitions.

Summary . . .

The Rescue Crew prides itself in the extra care it gives all the rescued cacti to help ensure their survival during and after their relocation. We believe that over 90 percent of all our relocated cacti survive and many bloom the first year after being relocated. Being native plants and having grown up in tough desert conditions, these rescued plants are quite hardy.

The Cactus Rescue Crew program has been a huge success due to the efforts of over 400 Rescue Crew volunteers and many supportive developers, land owners, landscape architects, landscapers, and great supporters & customers.

Thousands of homeowners have benefitted by being able to buy very reasonably priced cacti and getting some first hand practical advice and a brochure to assist with planting and care. All of this is accomplished with no out of pocket cost to the land owner or the developer.