For 10 weeks I have had the opportunity to work with both the Native Plant Nursery and the Cactus club. This experience has taught me a lot about many different plants that are used in our arid landscapes. Some native plants I have never seen before. Cacti are so hardy in the heat and drought which I knew before, but not with this much experience. A big highlight was getting to design a portion of Pima Prickly Park.

The section the Cactus club selected was on the east side of the park near the cement pathway to the offices. There was a large blank section with open dirt and some brittlebush. Seeing the runoff swale that ran to the area, I decided to design catchment basins to collect the water that came through the site. This would slow it down and sink it to help provide water for the plants when it rained. The design used several native plants, some cacti and some leafy, placed at in the shade, sun, and different areas near the basins, to experiment with their ability to withstand the least amount of water possible. The first step was to dig the basins out and pull out all the unwanted bushes and trees in the area. Then Pima county helped move extra dirt and rocks to the area to be shaped and placed. Finally, on July 25th, the plants were planted with some help from the Cactus club volunteers. I watered all the plants in that day and the 29th, I filled all the basins with water to give the plants a deeper soak. From then on, I only watered plants that looked like they were dying. Unfortunately, several of the plants looked like they were dying when we put them in. The shock of moving from an almost every day watering at the nursery, to an every 3 days watering in the hoop house made the fairy dusters and verbena pretty sad looking when we planted them. Needless to say, they didn’t last long out there in the blazing sun. I continued to water them til I left, but they were definitely dead at that point.

The results, so far, of the experiment were not too surprising. One plant that did surprise me was the creosote. It did not do as well as I thought it would. 3 of the 4 creosotes showed dead-looking leaves up until I left. Interestingly, the one that looked the most healthy was the one in the blazing sun with no shade. It was up on a berm but had plenty of green leaves. The others were partially or mostly in the shade with dead leaves. The limberbush was very hardy. In all placements, it was green and leafy til I left. All the cacti were also surviving, though it is hard for me to tell when they are dying. I know when they are dead, but only a couple of the senitas look like they were struggling with more yellowed and slightly wrinkly skin. The spreadsheet shows more of which plants I had to water when and when it rained. There were only two slightly large rains at .3 and .4 inches, so the monsoons didn’t help the project out much, but maybe this fall we will have some more rains.

Besides the site design and build, I also learned a lot working with the nursery and with the cactus club in their daily activities. Before this experience, I had never heard of cactus rescues. Most developments, mines, and new utilities are not my cup of tea, but the fact that we can at least do something to help the environment that is being destroyed gives me hope. The good reason for the rescues along with their fun Easter egg hunt like atmosphere really got me hooked. I even skipped a day of work of my other job to go to a rescue.

At the nursery, I had the experience of seeing so many different plants and their life stages from small seedlings all the way to 15 gallon potted trees. I learned about several endangered species we have as well, like the Huachuca water umbel. It is now thriving in the Mission Garden acequia because of the Native plant nursery. The nursery also taught me how to collect seeds to plant, propagate them, and to provide proper care for them as they move from larger to larger pots. In addition to this, I was taught
how to add lines to the drip irrigation and learned how each line of plants were grouped based on their water requirements.

    I want to thank Jessie, Rachel, Tracy, Andrew, Dick, Von, Crystal, Linda, and Cathy for all teaching me a lot this summer about plants whether they be cactus, succulents, or leafy guys. I've never had the experience of planting so many cacti before and it just amazes me how hardy they are.

Start

Basins done
Bring the Plants