

# Cactus Rescue Crew Program



*The "Cactus Rescue Crew"  
of the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society  
saves cacti and other succulents in Greater  
Tucson areas destined to be cleared for  
new development, a road widening,  
or possibly a new utility line.*

*Thanks to many conscientious developers  
and businesses, the Cactus Rescue Crew  
saves thousands of native plants  
each year that get new homes  
instead of being destroyed.*

## Introduction . . .

In 1999 four 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, new utilities or road projects.

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 many of the viable native trees and cacti for future replanting in the development. There are usually hundreds if not thousands of smaller saguaros, barrels, ocotillo, hedgehogs, pincushions, agaves, and other cacti that are not economically viable to relocate except by volunteers and could end up being destroyed if not rescued.

Since the start of our Cactus Rescue Crew Program in 1999, over 100,000 cacti have been rescued with our crew members volunteering over 36,000 hours of work during 460 rescues. TCSS has spent over \$240,000 purchasing state tags to legally remove and transport these cacti.

Rescued cacti find various homes throughout Arizona, including Pima Prickly Park at 3500 W. River Road, public buildings, schools, homes, and landscapes throughout the Southwest. We do not ship plants; please contact a local TCSS member nursery listed on our web.

The first step for TCSS is to get in contact with the landowner or developer early-on when they apply for a grading permit and before any machinery is brought onto the property so small plants are not crushed. Several steps are required by our 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 Cactus 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 plant 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 that were inventoried on the list. The landowner or agent signs the form, which is then filed by TCSS with the Arizona State Department of Agriculture to authorize the removal of the protected plants.

We obtain a Native Plant Removal Application for each site and associated Permits 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 requirements. Each member is notified by email a few days in advance of the rescue operation and is given rescue specifics. Some rescues are restricted to a limited number of crew members, but most are open to all members who would like to participate.

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

## **Cactus Rescue Process . . .**

Crew members show up on site early in the morning armed with picks, shovels, gloves, hats, water, boxes, dollies, and wheelbarrows. 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. We also give them emergency cell phone numbers and instructions on handling an emergency.

After the rescue crew has dug plants for a few hours, we 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 a 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. Some can be moved to a public property by filing a separate application.

## **More Information . . .**

Visit our web site: [www.TucsonCactus.org](http://www.TucsonCactus.org)  
Click on "Cactus Rescue" for more information.

We are a non-profit 501(c)3 educational organization. We can provide you with a complete inventory of all cactus removed from your site. They may be able to be considered a donation, please consult with your tax advisor for advice.

## **Contacts:**

Donna Ellis  
Cactus Rescue Crew Coordinator  
(520) 256-2447 (TCSS cell/text)  
Email: [cactus@TucsonCactus.org](mailto:cactus@TucsonCactus.org)

Noe Mayotte (520) 572-4053  
Cactus Rescue Crew Community Relations

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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 tag 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. Many participate simply because they believe in the cactus rescue crew program.

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 only sold at public sales held at our holding site or Pima Prickly Park. Our mailing lists and web site are used to announce sale dates which vary due to cactus availability. We normally hold about four sales per year. Sometimes a special sale is held if we acquire a lot of ocotillo as we do not like to hold them for over two weeks. Fresh is a must for successfully re-establishing ocotillo.

Please note that TCSS **does not** remove cacti from residences. Please contact a landscaper.

## **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 root plants. These brochures are available for printing from our Web site. One brochure is for barrels/hedgehogs/saguaros and one just for ocotillo since they require different care. Relocated cacti do require some special care until they are re-established, then they can survive without supplemental water or extra shade.

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 re-established.

## **Cactus Rescue Profits . . .**

Profits from the sale of our rescued cacti are used for educational activities including school grants, student cash prizes for Southern Arizona Science Fair projects (grades K to 12), educational brochures, and for club activities. In May of 2002, TCSS created the School Grant Program. The objective is to provide funds for Arizona K to 12 schoolteachers to buy materials to help expand the students' knowledge of cactus and succulents. The Science Fair yields some excellent projects which we feature in our newsletter, and events. We have also participated in educational activities where students build cactus models to explore unique desert survival traits of cactus and other succulents.

## **Summary . . .**

We pride ourselves in the extra care we give 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 that many bloom the first year after being relocated. Being native plants and having grown up in tough desert conditions, these rescued cacti are quite hardy.

We believe the program has been a huge success due to the dedication and efforts of over 500 crew volunteers and many supportive and conscientious developers, landowners, businesses, local governments, landscape architects, landscapers, and customers. We strive to support local landscapers and nurseries, not to compete.

Thousands of homeowners have benefitted by being able to buy very reasonably priced cacti and getting some first-hand practical advice. All of this is accomplished with no out-of-pocket cost to the landowner or the developer. Most developers will pay the stumpage fees for plants removed from Arizona State Trust Lands. TCSS always pays for the Arizona State native tags.