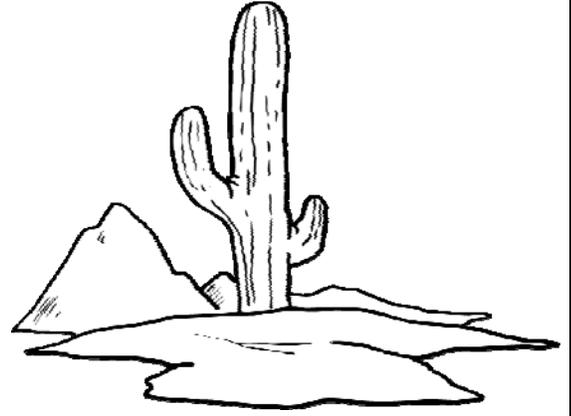


Desert Biome

You already have a good idea of what the desert is like. All deserts are very dry places; deserts get only a small amount of rain during the year. Some desert areas are so dry that they receive merely a half-inch of rain per year. The dryness means that only plants that have adapted to desert conditions, like the many species of cactus, can thrive there. Cactus plants are different from other plants because they store water inside themselves and have also adapted to being in the sun all the time. There usually aren't any trees in a desert biome but amazingly some trees have adapted to living in the desert. Only a few species of small mammals can be found in the desert. Except for camels and some African elephants that live in the desert areas of Namibia, deserts usually aren't suitable for species of large mammals.



Deserts occupy about one-fifth of the earth's surface. There are four kinds of deserts: hot, dry deserts; semiarid deserts; coastal deserts; and cold deserts.

The hot, dry desert is the one we are most familiar with because North America has three such deserts: Chihuahuan, Sonoran, and Mojave. The Chihuahuan Desert covers portions of northern Mexico and parts of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Temperatures there are hot in the summer and cool in the winter. There are only a few shrub species in the Chihuahuan Desert. The Sonoran Desert is located in Arizona, California and Northern Mexico. This is the hottest American desert and is famous for saguaro cactus. The Mojave Desert is also in Arizona and California and is home to about 200 unique plants including the Joshua tree.

The United States is also home to semi-arid desert like the Great Basin area of Nevada. Some parts of the Great Basin are classified as cold desert because they are in the mountains. Semi-arid deserts get more rainfall than hot, dry deserts and temperatures are cooler in the summer. Cool nights in the semi-arid desert give animals a bit more moisture in the form of morning dew.

A coastal desert occurs near the coastline of the ocean. A famous coastal desert is the Atacama Desert in Chile. A coastal desert has warm summers and cool winters. Antarctica has areas of cold desert biome. There only lichens grow on the rocky terrain.