When you imagine a desert, what do you think of first? Maybe it’s sand, heat or Gila monsters, but most likely it’s a cactus. Cacti are probably the most memorable characteristic of the desert.

Barrel Cactus
- The barrel cactus can be easily distinguished from other cacti because of its cylinder-shaped body.
- It usually reaches from around five to 11 feet tall, and at that height it is one of the largest cacti in the North American deserts.
- Its sides have ridges that are topped with dangerously sharp three- to four-inch spines.
- The barrel cactus is also a flowering plant. It has rings of yellow-green or red blossoms at its top.

Joshua Tree
- The Joshua tree got its name from the Mormon pioneers who thought the tree reminded them of Joshua, from the Old Testament of the Bible.
- The Joshua tree is the largest of the yuccas and grows only in the Mojave Desert.
- The Joshua tree’s height varies from 15 to 40 feet and its diameter ranges from one to three feet.
- The Joshua tree has a lifespan of about 200 years.

Saguaro Cactus
- The saguaro cactus has a smooth and waxy skin and is covered with two-inch spines that are located on the tree’s vertical ribs.
- In May and June, the cactus bears creamy white flowers with yellow centers that measure about three inches. The stem of the cactus can be 18 to 24 inches in diameter.
- Since it does not rain a lot in the desert, the cactus uses the water that it stores when it does rain.
- Its average lifespan is about 200 years.

Deserts are home to many living things. In fact, deserts are second only to tropical rainforests in the variety of plant and animal species that live there.

Many desert plants have made adaptations or changes that help the plants to survive in an environment with little water. Desert plants have two main adaptions:

- The ability to collect and store water
- Features that reduce water loss

Resources
- Desert Flora: Cactus, Grasses, Shrubs, Trees and Wildflowers
  http://www.desertusa.com/flora.html
- Desert Plants
  http://www.mbgnet.net/sets/desert/tplants.htm
- Desert Plants
  http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/desert_plant_page.htm
- Plants in the Desert
  http://library.thinkquest.org/26634/desert/plant.htm

Images are from http://www.sxc.hu/home. The text is adapted from Desert Plants, http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/desert_plant_page.htm