

# The Sonoran Desert: A land of two summers

by Debbie Hobbs, Alice-Vail Middle School, Tucson, AZ, Earth Camp for Educators 2011



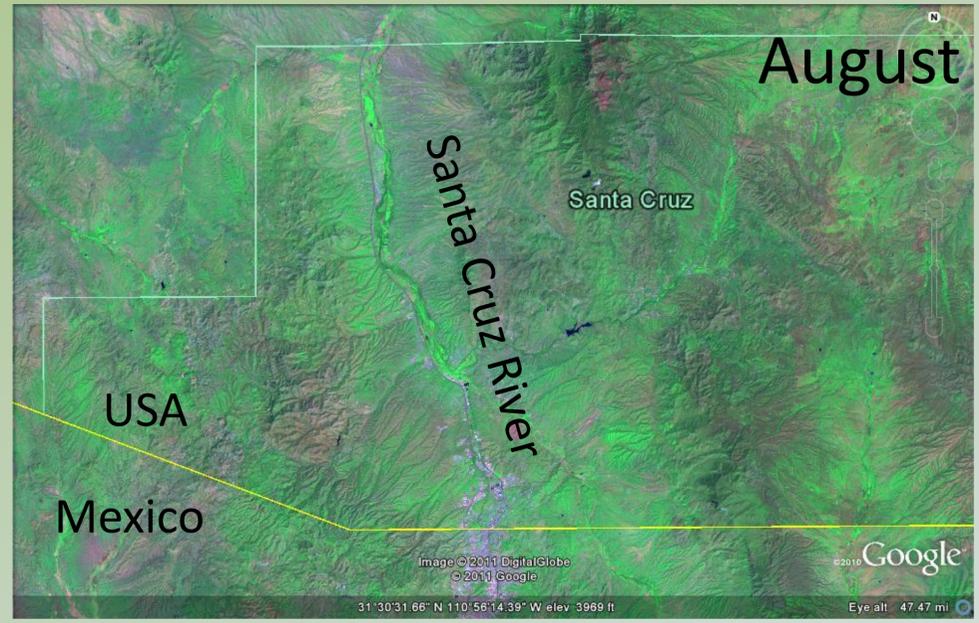
The  
Power of  
Perspective

Artist's view of a U.S. Landsat satellite. Credits: NASA.

The bright green color in these false-color Landsat images highlights healthy vegetation. Why did the landscape change color between May and August?



Area around Santa Cruz River, south of Tucson, May 2006  
The lack of bright green coloration in this false-color Landsat image illustrates the dry conditions of the arid foresummer.

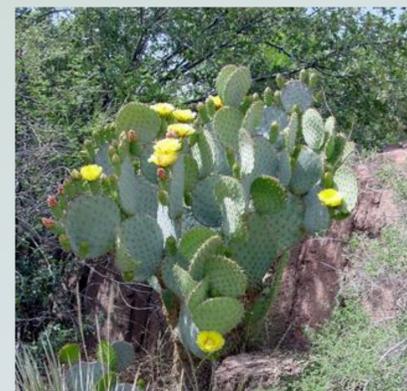


Area around Santa Cruz River, south of Tucson, August 2006  
This false-color Landsat image highlights healthy vegetation as bright green.

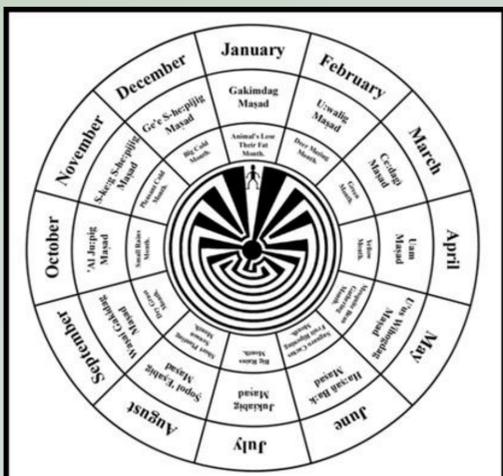
If you're not from the Sonoran Desert, you probably think that it has one long, insufferably hot summer. However, residents know that summer has two very different parts: the **Arid Foresummer** in May and June, and the **Monsoon Season** from July through September. During the **Monsoon Season**, moisture-laden air sweeps up from the Gulf of California, bringing rejuvenating rains to the parched desert. In this short period of time the Sonoran Desert can receive more than half of its total yearly rainfall. This moisture brings a growing season that sustains the desert for months.



Opuntia chlorotica ©  
2002 ASDM T.R. Van  
Devender



Opuntia chlorotica ©  
2004 ASDM Mark A.  
Dimmitt



The Tohono O'odham Calendar, Tohono O'odham Community College

The Tohono O'odham people, who are native to this region, were traditionally seasonal farmers and learned how to adapt to the extremes of the Sonoran Desert. In the Tohono O'odham calendar, May is the month to gather dry beans and a time of hunger. July is a month of rain, making the August month of planting possible.