

DEVILS CLAW

There are two species of “Devil’s Claw” that are found in Southern Arizona. *Proboscidea Altheafolia* which is a perennial plant and *Proboscidea Pariflora* which is an annual plant. Probably the easiest way to distinguish between the two species is that the annual *p. Altheafolia* has two-inch long bright yellow flowers and large (two-inch wide) shiny green leaves while the annual *p. Pariflora* has smaller pinkish-purple flowers and larger (up to three-inches wide) leaves. Both species are some times also called “elephant tusks” or “unicorn plant” because of the shape of the seedpod. The generic name *Proboscidea* comes from the Greek word “proboscis”, a term for an elephant’s trunk. The seedpods are edible. The immature green pods (before they ripen and turn woody) are sometimes steamed and eaten like okra. The seeds are rich in oil and protein and were a staple in the Native American diet. The dried pods are also used by the Tohono O’odham in basket weaving. The shape of the pods is an important factor in the plant’s dispersal. The curved hooks of the pods catch on the feet of animals and are transported away from the parent plant dispersing the seeds. When the animals dislodge the pods, they may also crush them which also aids in dispersing the seeds. The plants generally flower during the summer months. However, in certain environments, they may bloom in other times of the year. In mid-October of 2014, this writer found a couple of the annual Devil’s Claw plants in the upper Sycamore Canyon area of the Pajarito Mountains that were in multiple stages of their life. They had flowers, green immature pods and split dried pods all at the same time. All of the photos in this article were taken of these plants and their fruit.

Summarized by Tom Johnson in December 2014 from the Wikipedia and Desert USA web sites. All Photos were taken by T. Johnson.

Additional Material: GVHC Library File 4

The following photographs are of the *Proboscidea Pariflora* plant.



Proboscidea Pariflora Plant
Photo taken in October, 2014



Proboscidea Pariflora Plant
With Pods Prior to Ripening

DEVILS CLAW



Pinkish-Purple Flower of the
Proboscidea Pariflora



Proboscidea Pariflora Seed Pod
Prior to Ripening & Opening



Proboscidea Pariflora Seed Pod
Dried & Opened to Form the Claws



Proboscidea Pariflora Seed Pods
Dried & Opened to Form the Claws