Issue No. 2 November 2025

UTEP
CENTENNIAL MUSEUM
AND CHIHUAHUAN DESERT GARDENS

Monthly NEWSLETTER

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FLORAFEST RECAP

On October 11, we held our Fall edition of FloraFest, an event where the season itself invited everyone to plant new trees and flowers. The weather was perfect, creating the ideal atmosphere to enjoy the day and explore the wide variety of plants offered by the museum and the gardens.

The event began at nine in the morning, but by eight o'clock people were already lining up, excited to get in. Among the attendees were visitors who had participated in previous editions and decided to arrive early this year to find their favorite plants. We also saw former volunteers who, instead of helping organize the event, came to enjoy it and look for the perfect species for their homes.

Throughout the day, many families attended, and several brought their pets along, giving the festival a cheerful and "dog-friendly" atmosphere. Inside the event, visitors could find a wide selection of plants and trees. For those unsure about which species would best fit their space, experts were available to offer personalized guidance.

Among the specialists was Kevin Floyd, our Botanic Curator, as well as Robin Schofield, a member of Garden Masters, who not only assists visitors during these events but also promotes the use of native desert plants.

We were also joined by Wyn Anderson, founder of the gardens in 1999 and Botanical Curator at the museum for ten years, who now volunteers to help people care for their plants and ensure they thrive once taken home.

If you missed this wonderful edition, don't worry we'll see you again in the spring for the next FloraFest!

PLANT OF THE MONTH

EVERGREEN SUMAC

Did you know that Evergreen Sumac stays green year-round, even in the dry Chihuahuan Desert? Its leaves retain their vibrant green color across seasons, which distinguishes it from other plants that can change color according to the seasons. Its green color may vary slightly depending on environmental conditions, especially in colder or drier winters.

When the fruit ripens in mid-September, it is red, wider than long, and covered with fine hairs. The fruits taste sour and have traditionally been used in infusions to make a refreshing drink, like lemonade, and are a valued food source for birds and small mammals.

THANKSGIVING

This Thanksgiving, let's remember that every leaf, root, and drop of water is a reason to give thanks.
If you're looking for a more local, plant-based way to celebrate this year, here's a recipe inspired by the flavors of the Chihuahuan Desert.

NOPALES STUFFED WITH CHEESE AND PRICKLY PEAR SAUCE

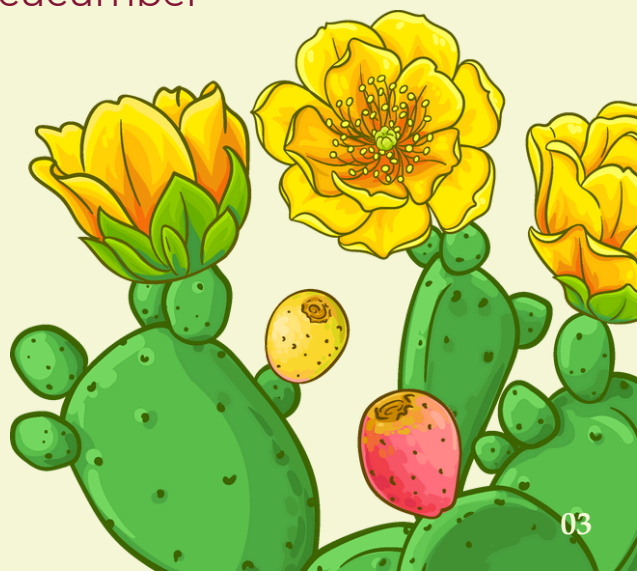
Main ingredients

-Tender nopal pads
-Oaxaca or asadero cheese
-Prickly pears (red, green, or yellow)
-Onion, garlic, chili, and lime juice

Quick preparation

Cook or grill the nopal pads, then fill them with cheese.
Blend the prickly pears with onion, garlic, chili, and lime to make the sauce.
Serve the warm stuffed nopales and drizzle the sauce on top.
Type of prickly pear | Flavor | Suggestion
Red | Sweet and creamy | Perfect with a touch of spice
Green | Tart and fresh | Great for non-battered nopales
Yellow | Very sweet | Best balanced with lime or cucumber

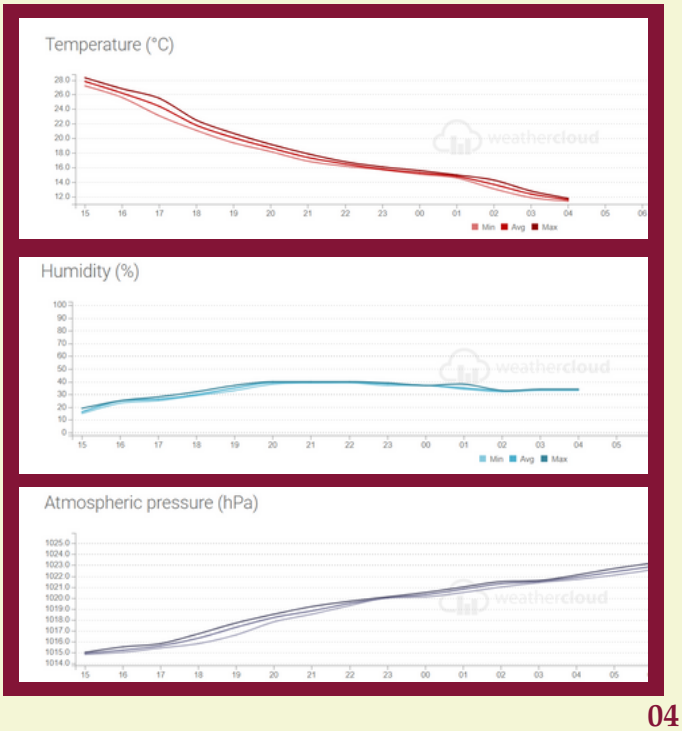
If you try this recipe, take a photo and tag us on social media!
You can find us as @CentennialMuseum on all platforms.
Let's celebrate gratitude, history, and the enduring flavor of the desert — together.



AN EYE ON THE SKY: THE CENTENNIAL MUSEUM'S NEW WEATHER STATION

In the heart of the Chihuahuan Desert Gardens, surrounded by native plants and desert sunlight, a small metallic tower now keeps a quiet watch over the sky. This new weather station at the Centennial Museum & Chihuahuan Desert Gardens brings together technology and nature to better understand how climate affects desert ecosystems and life on the UTEP campus. The idea originated at UTEP's Island Lab within the Computer Science Department, where researcher Luis explained that "El Paso had very limited detailed weather information the only complete station was at the airport—so we decided to install our own on campus to measure temperature, humidity, solar radiation, wind speed, and precipitation every ten minutes." The project, titled "Supporting Outdoor Household Water Sustainability Decision-Making through SWIM," was funded and led by Dr. Natalia Villanueva-Rosales, who serves as the Principal Investigator (PI), and is being developed by PhD student Damian Gallegos. Thanks to Dr. Villanueva-Rosales's leadership and financial support, the initiative became a reality, making the museum the first installation site for this innovative system. The station consists of an outdoor sensor array and an indoor data hub that transmits information to the cloud, where it becomes available in real time. According to Daniel Carey-Whalen , the museum's director, "It helps us make practical decisions if the system detects heavy rain, we turn off irrigation to save water. It also lets us compare humidity and temperature across different areas of campus to see how our plants respond to those changes." He added that this technology complements the museum's existing rain gauge and provides a more complete view of the local microclimate. The Centennial Museum is now part of a broader network of weather monitors across El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, connecting universities, institutions, and citizen scientists who are helping collect valuable climate data. "It's part of a growing citizen science movement," Daniel Carey-Whalen said. "There are people everywhere setting up weather monitors in their backyards and sharing their data so we can all better understand our environment."

Beyond its scientific value, the weather station also serves as an educational tool for UTEP students and could soon be featured in interactive exhibits for visitors. Inspired by the weather network in the state of Chihuahua, where data is updated every five minutes, the project aims to expand across Texas to strengthen the region's weather monitoring and forecasting capacity. "We'd love to add a sign with a QR code near the station," Daniel Carey-Whalen added, "so visitors can scan it and see the live data. It would be a simple but powerful way to connect science with the community." With this initiative, supported and funded by Dr. Villanueva-Rosales, the Centennial Museum has become not only a place of conservation and education but also a living laboratory where science, community, and the desert meet beneath the same borderland sky.



DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

Can you imagine celebrating death for four days instead of fearing it? That's exactly what happens in Mexico every November 2, when people celebrate **Día de Muertos, or the Day of the Dead.**

This tradition has pre-Hispanic roots, dating back to ancient Maya, Totonac, and Mexica (Aztec) cultures, among others. For these civilizations, death was not the end of life but the beginning of a journey to another world. They believed in Mictlán, the underworld, where souls traveled for four days before reaching their final destination. Upon arrival, they offered gifts to Mictlantecuhtli, the lord of the dead, and his companion Mictecacíhuatl, the lady of the deceased.

According to their beliefs, the soul had to pass through nine levels before reaching eternal rest, known as the "Obsidian of the Dead." This journey represented purification and transformation. Unlike Western beliefs, there was no concept of heaven or hell as a form of reward or punishment; the soul's destination depended on how the person had died.

With the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century and the introduction of Catholicism, indigenous beliefs merged with European traditions. The celebration evolved into All Souls' Day, which included processions, prayers, and blessings for the departed. This fusion gave rise to the modern Day of the Dead, a unique blend of ritual, memory, and spirituality that honors both life and death.

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Today, Día de Muertos is one of Mexico's most iconic celebrations. Families build seven level altars, each decorated with symbolic elements: candles to light the way home, marigold flowers (cempasúchil) whose color and scent guide the spirits, pan de muerto (bread of the dead), and traditional dishes to share with loved ones, photographs of the deceased, copal incense to purify the space, and personal items that once belonged to the departed. All of these components help guide the souls from the afterlife back to the world of the living, turning mourning into a celebration of memory and love.

More than a holiday, the Day of the Dead is an expression of identity and cultural resilience, a reminder that death does not erase life; it transforms it into memory.

References: Mauro Alberto Amador Lámbarri. (2014, July). El altar de muertos. El Altar de Muertos. https://www.uaeh.edu.mx/scige/boletin/prepa4/n4/m20.html

CALAVERITAS

Ana

La Muerte buscaba a Ana,
que de arriba pa' abajo andaba,
con su compu y su libretita,
por todos lados pasaba.
Llegó la flaca un día soleado,
como niña con cuento en la mano,
y de pronto le dijo cantando:
"¡Anita, tu hora ha llegado!"
Pero Ana le contestó:
"Espérame tantito, flaquita,
otro grupo ha llegado.
"La flaca, cansada, suspiró,
viendo que Ana no paraba,
y se fue murmurando entre risas:
"¡A esta ni muerta se le acaba la jornada!

Kevin

La Muerte buscaba a Kevin,
que entre plantas siempre andaba,
con gorros y guantes verdes,
por el jardín caminaba.
Llegó la flaca un día nublado,
vestida de flores, con sierra en la mano,
su sonrisa decía algo raro,
y su plan no era nada humano.
—Tu hora y la de las plantas ha llegado—,
le dijo con tono helado.
Pero Kevin, muy calmado, contestó:
—Las plantas no están listas, ¿sabes?
mejor regresa al mercado—.
La Muerte, rendida, se fue caminando,
porque Kevin la dejó esperando,
y murmuró entre risas temblorosas:
"¡Cuando crezcan tus flores, te vengo buscando!"

Stephanie

La Muerte por ahí andaba,
y Stephanie pintando estaba,
con su brocha y su mirada,
que a todos los muros dejaba encantada.
Llegó la flaca risueña y traviesa,
con su vestido manchado de piezas,
diciendo: "¡Ya vengo por ti, mi mente atrevida!
que tu último mes marca la despedida."
Pero Stephanie, viendo el mural,
le dijo tranquila, sin mal:
"Espérame tantito, huesuda pintada,
que esta obra aún no está terminada."
La flaca bufó, ya desesperada,
viendo que Stephanie no acababa,
y soltó riendo con voz animada:
"¡Mejor me la llevo antes de que acabe toda pintada!"

Amanda

Flotando por los pasillos del museo la flaca andaba
Cuando al pasillo de colecciones esta miraba
Estaba Amanda que restos examinaba
La Flaca confundida a ella se acercaba
Vestida elegante por si algo pasa
Y con una sonrisa a ella preguntaba
Que no a ti yo te buscaba
Porque con mis restos tu jugabas
Pero Amanda contesto concentrada
Entre huesos y rituales yo a ti te buscaba
La muerte al final se quedo desconcertada
Porque por primera vez alguien la buscaba
Y entre risas Amanda le gritaba
NO te preocupes huesuda entre restos
Y cultura también te damos entrada

CALAVERITAS

Daniel

La Flaca un día por El Paso paseaba,
pues a un gringo curioso buscaba.
Entre una montaña de mexicanos miraba,
cuando Daniel, sonriente, destacaba.
Hablando en español, la Muerte preguntaba:
“Daniel, ¿dónde estabas?”
Daniel, confundido, contestaba:
“Perdón... pero mí no comprender nada.”
La flaca soltó una carcajada:
“¡Ay, gringo, no se te entiende nada!
Mejor regrésate por donde andabas,
antes de que te cargue la flaca cansada.”
Pero Daniel al museo llegaba,
y a sus work studies torturaba.
La flaca, divertida, lo observaba,
pensando: “¡Este gringo ni muerto descansaba!”

Work- Studies

Por la puerta del museo la Muerte entraba,

pues a los work studies ella buscaba.

Que siempre tan duro trabajaban...

o al menos eso ellos pensaban.

De lejos miraba cómo cada hora cambiaban,

y le llamó la atención que Alexander tarde llegaba.

Con Paulina siempre platicaba,

¡y esa nunca se callaba!

Con más destreza observaba, mientras pensaba,

que Miranda en su casa nunca estaba,

y estresada siempre andaba.

Mientras la Huesuda volteaba,

vio a Cynthia parada mientras publicaba

las fotos que Abigail tomaba,

mientras de cansancio siempre se quejaba.

Pobre Maxine, que lloraba,

pues la luz del sol ya le faltaba,

y en colecciones siempre se quedaba.

La Muerte, mareada, ya no aguantaba,

pues los work studies nunca paraban.

Desesperada, la Huesuda gritó:

“¡Ya son las cuatro, la hora sagrada!”

No fue necesario que la flaca los llevara,

pues la hora de salida ya se acercaba,

y los work studies, corriendo, la dejaban.

CALAVERITAS

Museo

La Muerte un refugio necesitaba,
y el museo a su paso encontraba.
Cauta y curiosa, ella entraba,
mientras el museo amable la saludaba.
Miró a su alrededor, y sorprendida pensaba:
“¡Qué lugar tan familiar me resultaba!
Claro, cómo no recordaba...
¡si a la gente de aquí ya me la llevaba!”
Caminó entre salas y vitrinas encantadas,
viendo plantas, fósiles y huellas pasadas.
El Centennial Museum tranquilo reposaba,
mientras la flaca curiosa lo exploraba.
Mas al ver tanta historia guardada,
la huesuda quedó fascinada.
Y sonriendo, al fin murmuraba:
“¡Aquí me quedo un rato, encantada!
Entre ciencia, cultura y memoria sagrada,
ya ni la Muerte se siente cansada.”

Osvaldo

La Muerte buscaba a Osvaldo,
que en su oficina trabajaba,
y con mil post-its de colores
toda la pared decoraba.
Llegó la flaca un día cansada,
con su mapa y su mirada helada,
preguntando con voz alocada:
“¿Dónde está Osvaldo, mi jornada atrasada?”
Entre risas la flaca le gritó:
“¡Ya es hora de tus mil pendientes dejar!
Ven conmigo, que el descanso
también se debe agendar.”
Pero Osvaldo, sin levantar la mirada,
contestó con voz concentrada:
“No puedo, que el horario debo mandar,
y un evento tengo que agendar.”
La flaca, al final, rendida de esperar,
porque Osvaldo no deja de trabajar,
se fue diciendo entre risas sin cesar:
“¡No te llevo, Osvaldo, porque ni en el cielo
me vas a dejar descansar!”

CALAVERITAS
ENGLISH VERSION

Ana

Death was looking for Ana, who ran up and down with care, her notebook and laptop everywhere. One sunny day La Flaca came by, like a girl with a tale in her eye. She sang out loud, cheerful and bright: “Anita, it’s your time tonight!” But Ana replied, still on the run: “Hold on, Skinny, I’m not quite done another group just walked in!” Death sighed, tired and amazed, watching Ana still unfazed. She muttered as she turned away: “Even death can’t end her workday

Kevin

Death was searching for Kevin, among the plants, calm and green, with gloves and hats, a peaceful scene. La Flaca came on a cloudy dawn, dressed in flowers, saw in hand drawn. “Your time and your plants ‘has come,” she said, her voice as cold as the garden bed. But Kevin smiled, gentle and wise: “The plants aren’t ready come back with the sunrise.” Defeated, Death began to roam, and whispered, “When your flowers bloom, I’ll come to bring you home.”

Stephanie

Death wandered through the halls that day, while Stephanie painted life away. With brush in hand and colors bright, she filled each mural with her light. La Flaca, grinning, sly and sweet, her dress splashed with paint and heat, called out, “I’ve come for you, my muse, your final month you cannot refuse!” But Stephanie smiled, calm and clear, her voice soft, yet firm to hear: “Wait a moment, painted bone, this wall’s not done I work alone.” Death sighed, tired and bemused, seeing the artist still enthused. Then laughed, shaking her bony head: “I’ll come back later before you paint me dead!

Amanda

Amanda Through museum halls Death was floating, toward the collection rooms, calmly noting. There was Amanda, studying bones, among old rituals and ancient tones. Death approached, curious and polite, dressed elegantly, shining white. With a smile she asked with flair: “Wasn’t it you I came to snare? Why play with my remains with care?” Amanda replied, steady and wise: “Among bones and culture, your story lies.” Death stood puzzled, eyes open wide, for the first time, she felt surprise. Amanda laughed, her voice full of grace: “Don’t worry, Skinny, you have a place in our halls of ritual and faith.”

CALAVERITAS
ENGLISH VERSION

Daniel

One day Death walked through El Paso town, searching for a gringo with a curious frown. Among a mountain of Mexicans there, Daniel stood smiling, with bright blond hair. In Spanish, Death asked with a grin: “Daniel, where have you been?” Daniel replied, polite but lost: “Sorry... mí no comprender, boss.” Death laughed, her bones shaking loud: “Gringo, I can’t understand your sound! Better go back where you belong, before I carry you along.” But Daniel just went to the museum’s side, where work-studies ran and cried. Death giggled and softly said: “Even dead, this gringo won’t rest in bed!”

Osvaldo

Death was looking for Osvaldo, who worked with notes in bright array, a thousand Post-its led the way. La Flaca came with tired grace, a map in hand, a weary face. “Where’s Osvaldo?” she cried aloud, “My schedule’s late, I’m not proud!” Laughing, she said, “It’s time to rest, come with me, forget the stress!” But Osvaldo, calm and aware, said, “I’ve got events to prepare.” Death sighed, shaking her head, and laughed as she quietly said: “I won’t take you, Osvaldo dear, you’d still be working up here!”

Museum

Death was searching for a place to rest, and the museum seemed simply the best. Cautious yet curious, she stepped inside, as the museum welcomed her with pride. She looked around, surprised to recall: “This place feels familiar after all! Of course it’s clear as bone, I’ve taken many from this zone!” She walked through fossils, art, and lore, stories of life forevermore. The Centennial stood calm and bright, as Death explored with quiet delight. Surrounded by culture, history, and grace, the bony lady found her place. Smiling wide, she softly said: “I’ll stay here awhile instead. Among science, memory, and sacred art, even Death feels life in her heart.”

Work-Studies

Through the museum door Death came, looking for the work studies by name. They worked so hard or so they said though often their breaks led instead. From afar she watched them all, Alexander late, chatting in the hall. With Paulina always at his side, their laughter echoing far and wide. Miranda running, never still, Cynthia posting, photos to fill. Abigail sighing, tired and sore, while Maxine stayed in collections once more. Death grew dizzy, couldn’t cope, the work never ended, there was no hope! “Four o’clock!” she cried in dread, but the students were already ahead. They fled before she could say goodbye, and Death sighed with a tired sigh: “Not even Death can match their pace I’ll come back when they take a break!”

MEET THE STAFF

PAULINA LOPEZ

Work-Study Student

Paulina López is one of our talented work studies who joined the Centennial Museum & Chihuahuan Desert Gardens team in July of this year. She is currently majoring in Multimedia Journalism with a minor in Creative Writing at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Her passion for communication and creative storytelling shines through in everything she does at the museum.

For Paulina, working at the museum has been both a personal and professional learning experience. She enjoys being part of a space that promotes education, culture, and community connection along the borderland.

Being in charge of responsibilities such as the monthly newsletter and creating social media content has helped her strengthen her résumé and prepare for future career opportunities. She plans to graduate in May 2026 and feels that her time at the museum is helping her gain valuable experience for her future in journalism and visual communication.

When asked about her favorite part of the museum, Paulina doesn't hesitate; she says it's the Ethnography section. To her, this area is essential because it helps us understand where we come from and how our history and traditions shape our present-day society. She believes that knowing our roots is key to understanding the world we live in and appreciating the cultural diversity of this region.
Outside of work, Paulina enjoys taking walks with her dog and watching movies, which she describes as her way to "turn off her brain" and recharge after busy days. She laughs, saying that those quiet moments help her stay creative and balanced between school, work, and life.

THANK YOU, STEPHANIE!

We would like to take a moment to express our gratitude to Stephanie Ruiz, our Curatorial Assistant, for her outstanding work and dedication over the past year.

Stephanie has been an essential part of the museum team, contributing not only to the installation of each of our recent exhibitions but also to managing the museum's social media presence. Thanks to her creativity and effort, we've maintained a cohesive and engaging visual identity that connects our exhibitions and activities with the community.

Among her many contributions are the two beautiful murals featured in our exhibitions "Cultivating Your Home: Embracing Chihuahuan Desert Diversity " and "Biodiversity Hotspot Reimagined." These pieces reflect her creativity, passion, and deep commitment to the museum's mission.

Beyond her curatorial work, Stephanie has shown great enthusiasm for cultural outreach and teamwork, consistently bringing fresh ideas and positive energy to every project.

As Stephanie concludes her role at the end of October, we want to sincerely thank her for all she has accomplished. Her dedication, enthusiasm, and professionalism have left a lasting mark on our team and on the exhibitions she helped bring to life.

We wish her the very best in all her future endeavors. Thank you, Stephanie, for everything you've given to the museum!

NOVEMBER DIY

One of the most important aspects of a Día de los Muertos altar is the flowers used to decorate it. According to tradition, Aztec marigolds, or cempasúchil, are placed on altars to guide the spirits of deceased loved ones back to the land of the living. This simple craft can be used to make cempasúchil in areas where the flower is not available or does not grow naturally. **Materials Needed: Orange Tissue Paper, Scissors, Pen, and a Stapler.**

Step One

Stack 12-15 pieces of tissue paper.

Step Two

Staple the center of the stack and draw a circle surrounding the staple.

Step Three

Cut the excess and cut several lines along the edge of the circle to create the petal shape.

Step Four

Begin folding up each layer of the paper to form the flower

Step Five

The flower is complete and ready to be placed on the altar!

NOVEMBER HOLIDAYS

NATIONAL

1

BISON DAY

Since 2012, this date has honored the national mammal of the United States, an animal that has played a key cultural, economic, and environmental role throughout history.

Check out our museum's bison, located on the third floor in the Ethnology room.

NATIONAL

28

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE DAY

The day after Thanksgiving, we honor and celebrate the rich cultures, traditions, and contributions of Native American communities across the United States. This day reminds us to recognize their lasting influence in every aspect of our society from art, education, and medicine to military service and community leadership.

INTERNATIONAL

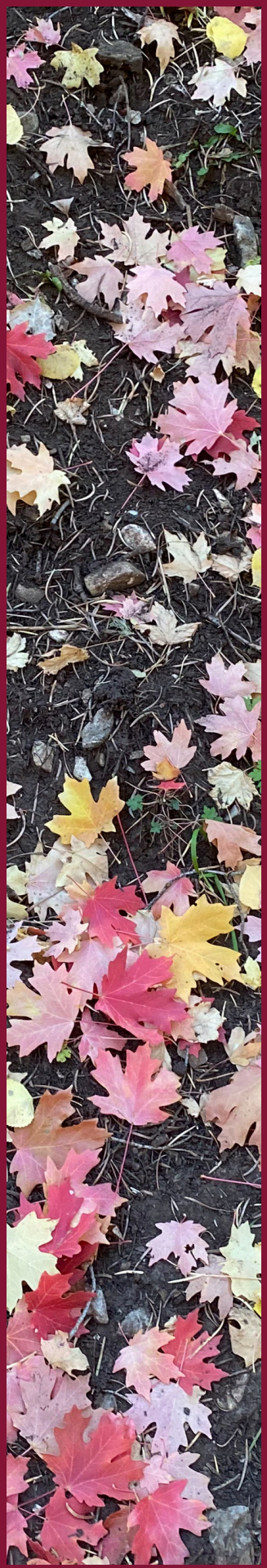
29

JAGUAR DAY

Today we celebrate the majestic jaguar and the crucial role it plays in keeping ecosystems healthy across Latin America. As the largest cat in the Americas and the third largest in the world the jaguar symbolizes strength, balance, and biodiversity.

Our jaguar is fantastic example of artistry completed by the Huichol group.

UPCOMING EVENTS



MINDFULNESS AT THE MUSEUM

Thursdays @ Noon

Instructor: Leilainia Marcus of the Sunset Parlor

Oct 09	**Expanding Your Consciousness with Art**	Experience the expansive space between everything: every thought, every object, ever atom.
Oct 23	**Awaken Your Senses: A Garden Meditation**	Enliven your 5 senses - taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight as we journey through the garden.
Nov 06	**Reset and Refocus with a Walking Meditation**	Invite peace in every step with a relaxing walking meditation in the garden.
Nov 20	**Yoga, Meditation, & Tea**	Enjoy a beginner-friendly, yoga and meditation session followed by tea in the garden.
Dec 04	**Mandala Creating and Coloring**	Experience the calming and therapeutic benefits of this artful meditation as we create sacred geometric symbols such as the Sri Yanta and Chakras.

Connect with the present moment at the Centennial Museum and Chihuahuan Desert Gardens. Take a break from your busy schedule and join us for engaging, mindfulness-based activities that will leave you feeling relaxed and recharged.

FREE EVENT

From drought to downpour: Understanding ecosystems in the Southwest

Marguarite Mauritz

Assistant Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, UTEP

Wednesday, November 12

@ 6:00 PM

Centennial Museum

Refreshments provided