



Arid Glasshouse

The display pod is designed to act as a stimulus for discussion about some of the plants to be found in this **hot** and **arid** climate zone (less than 100mm of rainfall per year). These are some background notes to the plants used in the pod, which may help teachers and group leaders in their interpretation of this glasshouse to their pupils.



Indian fig

Opuntia ficus-indica



The fruit of prickly pears, commonly called cactus figs, is edible, although it has to be peeled carefully to remove the small spines on the outer skin before consumption. The taste of the fruit is sweet and not unlike watermelon and they are used to make confectionary, jams, jellies and a refreshing drink.



String

Agave sisalana



Sisal gives stiff fibres from the leaves which is used in rope making. Apart from ropes, twines and general cordage, sisal is used in low-cost and speciality paper, dartboards, mattresses, carpets, and macramé. Each leaf contains an average of 1000 fibres! Perhaps your cat has a scratching post made from sisal?!

Key to symbols



Recreation



House and home



Ornamental



Food and drink



Medicine



Shampoo

Aloe vera



Aloe vera has been used externally to treat various skin conditions such as cuts, burns and eczema. It is alleged that the sap eases pain and reduces inflammation. Cosmetic companies add the sap to products such as make-up, tissues, moisturisers, soaps, sunscreens and even toilet paper! In Japan it is commonly used as an ingredient in commercially available yoghurt.



Birth control

Dioscorea elephantipes



This plant is a tuberous vine-like plant that is native to South Africa, including the Cape of Good Hope. It takes its name 'elephant's foot' from the appearance of the stem which grows slowly but can reach more than 3m in circumference with a height of 1m. It contains diosgenin which was used as the progesterone component of early combined contraceptive pills.



Tequila

Agave tequilana



This plant is used to make Tequila, a popular alcoholic drink and grows in Mexico. It is a succulent with spiky, fleshy leaves. In the wild after about 5 years, the plant will produce a huge yellow flower spike that is pollinated by bats, after which the plant dies. Although you will not find this particular agave species here in this glasshouse, look for the many other kinds of agave that you will find with a variety of leaves.