

## It's a tad early, but saguaros already are flowering locally



APRIL 29, 2013 12:00 AM • DOUG KREUTZ ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The first brilliant white blooms of saguaro cacti - the state flower of Arizona - are bursting out in Sabino Canyon and other sites around Tucson.

April is on the early side for saguaro blooms, which usually hit their peak in May and June.

But no need to be too amazed.

Ask plant experts about saguaro blooms and you'll learn that some members of the species produce flowers, well, whenever they darn well please.

"Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum phenology records show saguaro blooms in every month of the year except February," said Mark Dimmitt, a former director of natural history at the museum who is known for his cactus expertise.

Dimmitt noted, however, that saguaros have produced "only an occasional flower here and there in most months" other than the months of their normal blooming season.

### BEAUTY OF THE BLOOM

A Saguaro National Park visitor guide describes saguaro flowers as "big, bold and numerous," and notes that some plants bloom in late April before the more widespread bloom in May and June.

"Each blossom opens in the cool of the night a few hours after the sunset," the guide says. "By the next afternoon, the flower has wilted and the brief period of bloom ended. The spectacle repeats itself night after night for about four weeks until as many as 100 flowers have appeared on each saguaro."

### FLOWERS WITH ALLURE

Saguaro blooms have a purpose beyond posing for photos.

They attract flying animals - from white-winged doves and long-nosed bats to honeybees and moths. As these airborne visitors chow down on the sweet nectar inside saguaro flowers, they become powdered with pollen.

Then, as they flit from flower to flower, they pollinate along the way.

The fruit of saguaros ripens in June and July - with the pulp of the fruit containing seeds that can lead to a new generation of the towering species.

On StarNet: View more photos of saguaro flowers at [azstarnet.com/gallery](http://azstarnet.com/gallery)

Contact reporter Doug Kreutz at [dkreutz@azstarnet.com](mailto:dkreutz@azstarnet.com) or at 573-4192. On Twitter: [@DouglasKreutz](https://twitter.com/DouglasKreutz)