

The Weekly Plant

18 March 2013

Common names: desert anemone, desert windflower

Scientific name: *Anemone tuberosa*¹

TAV location:

On the red trail. Begin opposite lots 176/177 and go about 30 yards to the second shallow drainage that crosses the trail (the trail here is lined on both sides with rocks). Back up a few steps and look to your right (south), even under the shrub. CAUTION: the trail goes down and is sandy. Footing can be a bit tricky.



Discussion:

We found this little native during the Village trail hikes last Saturday. One of the hikers said “Anemone? Like the animal?” Yes, it sounds the same, but the plant got there first. The name anemone was given to the plant in the 1500s; to the animal not until the late 1700s.² The Greek word *anemos* means “wind”, giving rise to the other common name: windflower.¹

Desert anemone is in the Ranunculaceae (buttercup family). This large family “contains some of the showiest of Arizona wild flowers, notably the columbines, larkspurs, and monkshood.”³ Unfortunately, here in the lower Rincons we aren’t going to see many of these plants. A quick look through *Arizona Flora* indicates most Arizona members of this family are found only above 4,000 or 5,000 feet. Look for them on that next trip to Flagstaff!

The buttercup family has two characteristics that may make it easy to recognize. 1) The leaves are usually divided and lobed. Think back on the peonies, columbine, and clematis you’ve seen. 2) The pistil (female flower part) is often rounded, almost a knob, and is usually surrounded by many stamens (male flower parts).

How does all this apply to desert anemone? The leaves are indeed divided, usually into 3 parts, and each part is lobed. These leaves are basal, growing out of an underground tuber (hence *Anemone tuberosa*). The flower is held on a long stalk, said to reach 16”, but our plants are probably no more than 6” high. The flower has 8-10 white to pale pink sepals (there are no petals) that will darken as they age. The pistil is rounded and will elongate as the seeds mature.



Flower. Note the ring of yellow stamen around the central, rounded pistil.



Along the flower stalk there is a bract - a modified leaf often held below a flower or flower cluster. The bract of desert anemone looks very similar to the true, basal leaves, a key ID feature if you are trying to distinguish it from similar species.

¹ Tropicos (<http://www.tropicos.org/>) is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.

² Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=anemone>).

³ Arizona Flora, Kearney, Peebles, and collaborators, 1951.



Left: divided and lobed basal leaf (red arrow) and leafy bract about half-way up the flower stem (black arrow). The flower bud is made of white sepals that are pinkish when open. The flowers close at night and don’t open until the morning warms. This picture was taken at 8AM. To see open flowers, wait until after 9AM to look for this plant. Top right: maturing fruit. This is the elongating pistil. Bottom right: fuzzy seeds.