

GLOSSARY

abdomen - One of the three main body parts of Arthropods. The abdomen is the last section. It has the reproductive organs and may also have a tail or stinger. See the Arthropod diagram on the [Special Illustrations](#) page.

abundant - More than enough.

adaptation - A characteristic (body part, behavior, etc.) that helps a plant or animal survive in its environment.

algae (singular alga) - Simple non-seed bearing plants (including one-celled plants and diatoms and colonies of such cells).

ambush - To attack from a hiding place. Ambush hunters hide until their prey is very close and then attack.

amphibian - An animal that can live in both air and water. Amphibians can breath air with their lungs and can absorb oxygen through their skin.

analyze - To examine results to determine what happened or what it means.

annual - A plant that lives for only one growing season. In areas with limited growing seasons, this means that the plant may only live for a few weeks or months. Most vernal pool plants are annuals.

anther - The part of a flower where pollen is produced.

antifreeze - A chemical that keeps water from freezing, often used in car radiators.

aquatic - Of or living in water.

aquatic insect larvae (singular larva) - The immature form of an insect that lives in water.

basal rosette - When the leaves on a plant are arranged in a circular pattern at the base of the stem. [Soap Plant](#) has a basal rosette of leaves.

biennial - A plant that lives for two growing seasons. Usually this means that it germinates one year and make seeds the following year.

bract - A bract is a modified (different shaped) or reduced (smaller than normal) leaf just below a flower. Sometimes bracts can be colorful as in the Owl's-clovers. Sometimes they are very tiny as in grasses.

camouflage - A behavior, shape, color and/or pattern that helps a plant or animal blend in with its surroundings.

carnivore - An animal that eats meat. In the food web this can be an organism that eats the organism that eats the plants.

cilia (singular cilium) - Microscopic short hairs on the surface of an organism.

colonize - Move into a new area (as in the pilgrims colonized America). Non-native plants will also colonize new areas, particularly disturbed sites.

cross-pollination - When the ovary of one flower is fertilized (pollinated) by the pollen of another flower. Through cross-pollination, each parent flower contributes half of the genetic material to the seeds.

common name - The name most people use to refer to a species.

conclusion - A reasoned judgment.

condensation - The change of a substance from a gas to a liquid usually caused by a decrease in temperature.

crustacean - Any member of a taxonomic group of animals which includes crabs, beach hoppers, pill bugs and shrimps.

cyst - An embryo ([larva](#)) encased in a shell. See also the special report section at the bottom of the [Fairy Shrimp](#) page.

decade - One decade is equal to ten years.

depression - A low spot or the lowest spot in an area.

detritus - Particles from dead, decaying plants and animals.

distinctive - Something not like anything else. A skunk has a distinctive odor.

dominant - A dominant plant is one of the plants that occupies the most space in an area.

dormant - Not actively growing or functioning.

drought - A period when there is less than average rainfall.

ecosystem - A community made up of all of the plants and animals in an area that share a particular physical environment. Examples of aquatic ecosystems are a stream, a lake or a wetland.

emerge - To rise, come forth, or come out into view.

endemic - When an organism lives in only one habitat, it is said to be endemic to that habitat. A plant or animal can also be endemic to an area or region.

evaporate - To dry up.

evolution - The gradual change in organisms that occurs over hundreds of thousands or millions of years.

evolved - Changed over hundreds of thousands or millions of years.

feces - Bodily waste discharged from the intestines. Poop.

fertilizers - Nutrients added to improve plant growth.

floret - The reduced (smaller than normal) flower of many plant families, but especially those of the grass family.

flowerhead - Members of the Sunflower Family have special flowers called flowerheads. They are made up of many, tiny, individual flowers growing together. See the Sunflower diagram on the [Special Illustrations](#) page.

food web - The network of organisms in an ecosystem that moves food energy from producers (plants) through several layers of consumers (animals).

grassland - A plant community containing mostly grasses and other short plants, but few shrubs or trees.

habitat - A place to live.

hardpan - A clay, rock, or mineral layer beneath the soil that water cannot easily pass through.

hemi-parasite - A hemi-parasitic plant is one that receives part of its nutrition by stealing it from other plants. See also [parasite](#).

herbivore - An animal that eats plants. This is usually the first level consumer of the food web.

hypothesis - An assumption or prediction designed to be tested

inedible - Not fit to be eaten. Sometimes used to describe the discarded parts (such as skin, bones, shell) of something otherwise edible.

invasive - To encroach upon, to spread through, and usually harm.

invertebrate - Small animals without backbones.

larvae (singular larva) - The young and immature form of an animal, unlike the adult, that must change to become an adult.

life cycle - All of the stages of life of an organism, from the adults of one generation to the adults of the next generation. For example: The life cycle of a frog includes the following life stages: Adult frog > egg > tadpole > immature frog > adult frog.

macroscopic - Can be seen by the naked eye, but may be seen clearer with a hand lens.

magnify - To make something appear bigger such as with a magnifying glass, hand lens or microscope.

mammal - A warm-blooded animal with hair that breathes air, has internal fertilization and nurses its live-borne young.

Mediterranean climate - A yearly weather pattern where rain falls during a wet season, followed by several months of little or no rainfall. This climate is found in several areas of the world including the Mediterranean region of Europe, California, South Africa and Australia.

metamorphosis - A complete change in form and habits of an animal that occurs when it transforms from a larva into an adult. Caterpillars go through metamorphosis to become butterflies.

methods - Ways or procedures.

microscopic - Not able to be seen without a microscope.

mima mound - A large hump of soil in a vernal pool grassland. Mima mounds can be a few inches to a few feet high.

molt - To shed the outer layer. Usually used in reference to arthropods (insects and related organisms) shedding their exoskeleton.

mottled - Covered in blotches of different colors.

multi-lobed - Having many lobes or divisions. Think of your fingers as lobes of your hand. This would make your hand multi-lobed.

nectar - A sugary juice made by flowers to attract and reward pollinators.

observe - To watch carefully, paying attention to details or behavior.

observation - A description of a fact or event, often measured with instruments.

omnivore - An animal that eats both plants and animals. Humans are omnivores.

ovary - The part of a flower that contains the ovules (eggs) where seeds develop.

ovule - An egg.

parasite - A parasitic plant is one that receives all of its nutrition by stealing it from other plants. See also [hemi-parasite](#).

parasitism - A relationship between two organisms, where one uses the other as a host, usually injuring it but not killing it quickly.

parthenogenesis - The ability of a female organism to produce fertilized eggs without mating with a male.

pea flowers - Members of the Pea Family have special petals, each with a name. They are the banner petal, wing petals and keel petal. See the Pea flower diagram on the [Special Illustrations](#) page.

perennial - A plant that lives for many years.

pesticides - Chemicals designed to kill unwanted plants or animals.

petals - The often brightly colored, leaf-like parts of a flower.

photosynthesis - Photosynthesis is the process by which green plants use sunlight to turn air and water into sugars and other nutrients. This is how plants make their own food.

pistil - The female part of a flower, usually divided into a stigma, style and ovary.

pollen - The powdery dust from the parts of a male flower. Pollen is necessary to [pollinate](#) the ovary of a plant to make seeds. Pollen is also collected by some insects as food for their offspring.

pollinate - To fertilize a plant. This involves moving pollen to the ovary and ovum. See also [cross-pollination](#) and [self-pollination](#) for additional information.

pollination - The transfer of pollen from the anther to the stigma of a flower.

pollinator - An animal that moves pollen from the anther of a flower to the stigma.

pollutants - Things that pollute water, land, and air, such as metals, chemicals, oil, and sediment (soil).

polluted - Unclean or dirty, particularly an environment contaminated by man-made waste.

precipitation - A form of moisture that comes from clouds and is deposited on the earth as rain, sleet, snow, hail or mist.

protozoa - Microscopic, single-celled organisms.

pupae (singular pupa) - The life stage of an insect between the larvae and adult stages. When the insect changes its form through metamorphosis.

reduce - To make something smaller or appear smaller.

resemble - Looks similar to something else. The shell of a seed shrimp resembles a seed.

rhizome - A plant root which runs horizontally under the soil. New leaves or stalks can grow from the joints in these roots. The [perennial](#) grasses used in lawns spread by rhizomes.

rodent - Any of a large group of small gnawing mammals (gophers, voles, and mice).

runoff - Water that runs off the land.

saturated - Filled with water to a point where no more moisture can be absorbed.

scale - A proportion between two sizes of an object (as between those of a drawing and its original).

scavenger - An animal that eats whatever is available. Usually that means it eats already dead animals. Some [carnivores](#) which hunt prey may also scavenge.

scat - The droppings ([feces](#)) of an animal. Scat usually refers to those droppings left out in the open to mark an animal's territory. Fox and Coyote leave scat in obvious places to show their area and keep other animals away.

scientific name - The unique Latin name that scientists assign to each species.

self-pollination - When the ovary of a flower is fertilized ([pollinated](#)) by the pollen from the same flower. Flowers which are self-pollinated do not require pollinators. Because the flowers do not cross with other plants, all of the genetic material comes from a single parent.

sepals - The (sometimes colorful) leaf-like parts of a flower below the petals.

shore birds - Birds that search around the edge of the water (shore) for food.

soil - The upper layer of earth that may be dug or plowed and in which plants can grow.

sparse - Occurring in limited numbers; not very dense. Sparse [vegetation](#) refers to areas in which a lot of soil shows through!

species – Plants or animals that are the same as each other and breed only with one another.

sprawling - To sprawl is to lie in a spread out and relaxed position. Sprawling plants have long, uneven stems which trail along the ground.

spore - A spore is like half a seed. It contains the genetic material of only one parent. Seeds always contain the genetic material of two parents even if they are both the same.

stamen - The pollen-producing male organ of a flower that consists of an anther and a filament (stalk).

stamenoides - A structure similar to a stamen but without pollen. Stamenoides occur in some flowers in the Lily Family. The photograph for [Elegant Brodiaea](#) shows the stamenoides.

stigma - The tip of the pistil of a flower which receives the pollen grains.

storm drains - The openings that lead to the system of underground pipes which collect and move rain water.

synchronous - Happening all at the same time. Secret agents synchronize their watches. Many species of vernal pool plants have a synchronous bloom to attract pollinators.

taproot - A taproot is a large, single root which grows straight into the ground. A carrot is a type of taproot.

thorax - One of the three main body parts of arthropods. The thorax is the central part between the head and abdomen. The legs and wings are attached to the thorax. The thorax contains the muscles necessary for walking and flight. See the Arthropod diagram on the [Special Illustrations](#) page.

translucent - Describes something that light can pass through but you can't see all the way through. Usually the surface is a bit shiny and the guts only show through a little bit!

transparent - Transparent means see-through. This usually means that the skin of an organism is completely see-through and you can see its guts!

tributary - A stream that feeds into a larger stream or river.

umbel - A cluster of flowers with all the stems coming from one point. Picture in your mind the spokes of an umbrella. [White Hyacinth](#) is a good example of a plant with its flowers in an umbel.

upland - The higher, drier areas of a vernal pool grassland.

urban runoff - Water that runs off land in towns and cities.

vegetation - Vegetation refers to plants or plant material in general.

vernal - The Latin name for spring.

wading birds - A long-legged bird that wades into water in search of food, such as egrets and herons.

wastewater - Water that drains from your home or other buildings down pipes and into the sewer system.

waterfowl - A bird that is often near water such as ducks and geese.

watershed - All the land connected by the water flowing through it.

water table - The surface (top) of water stored in the soil.

