Creosote
The Medicine Chest of the Desert

By Tom McDonald

Growing up in the Midwest, the earthworms that littered the sidewalks after a good heavy thunderstorm scented the air with an earthy musk. After our recent September monsoon rains, I couldn't find an earthworm but the air was fragrant with the oily, pungent smell of Creosote, sometimes called Greasewood or Little Stinker!

Not to be confused with the pine tar substance used to treat lumber, Creosote is thought to be the oldest living plant in the desert. One specimen in California was carbon dated to 13,000 years old. This hardy plant is not often used in backyard landscaping but is quite plentiful in our desert, opportunistically bursting with tiny green leaves and yellow blooms after a good rain no matter the season. Ancient desert tribes believed Creosote brought one into harmony with the sun. In fact, I know a few people today who do a final rinse with a Creosote wash after their daily shower in lieu of sunscreen.

When you come upon Creosote along a desert trail, you might notice that it usually stands alone. This self-survivor emits an oily germicide that prevents seeds, even its own, from germinating nearby, thereby eliminating competition for precious water. It is this antibacterial, antifungal, germicidal oil that has earned Creosote another nickname: the medicine chest of the desert. Native

Americans massaged creosote salve into their skin to soothe dryness, abrasions, ease allergies and joint pain. If you harvest Creosote leaves and blooms, you should dry them first, and then grind the material up before creating your salve. A word of caution: creosote will leave an impossible to remove residue abd smell on your blender, utensils, or other item used in preparation.

For more information, check out our website at www.smilingdoglandscapes.com.