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Plants Fact Sheet

The Kelp Forest, River Zone, Extreme Zone and Family Discovery Room feature an array of plant species that demonstrate how they have adapted to their environment, how they interact with various animal species and why they are of vital importance to their particular ecosystem.

Kelp Forest

The 188,000-gallon tank will feature a nutrient-rich living kelp forest like those off the California coast.

- Kelp forests are underwater areas with a high density of kelp. They are able to support a wide variety of animal species.
- Considered the “rainforest of the sea,” kelp forests feature distinct horizontal layers: a sunny canopy, a dimly lit middle, and a dark forest bottom.
- The giant kelp plant has long stems, called stipes, that are supported by gas-filled bladders located at the base of each blade that keep the kelp afloat.
- Giant kelp is one of the fastest growing plants in the world; it is the largest marine algae and can reach lengths of more than 100 feet.
- Pieces of decomposing kelp sink to the depths of the ocean providing food for deep-sea creatures.
- Giant kelp has a multitude of inhabitants. Invertebrates graze on the blades and fish use the stipes for shelter.

River Zone

A variety of water-loving plants are typically found in the river zone. The plants help prevent sedimentation and remove excess nutrients in water. Plant vegetation in and around rivers also work with the water, air and land to create a resistance to current flow and provides food and shelter. Following are two examples of plants found in Ecosystems’ River Zone:

San Joaquin Willow:

- The willow, a deciduous shrub/tree likes full-sun, is sturdy and able to withstand seasonal flooding.
- Willow shoots were also used by native Americans to weave baskets, make fish traps, fence posts, shelters, and firewood.
- This willow is useful in preventing shore erosion.

White Alder

- The White Alder can grow rapidly, up to 90 feet tall and 40 feet wide.
- This tree is a nitrogen-fixing plant and will grow right on the edge of a river with the water flowing around it.

- This tree produces brown flowers and has cone-like fruits that remain on the tree throughout most of the year.

Family Discovery Room

The Discovery Room features plants that you may find in your own backyard. Here are two examples from the Discovery Room's yard:

Lamb's Ear:

- Soft and feathery, Lamb's Ear plant is a perennial herb densely covered with a soft and velvety, pale gray-green foliage.
- They prefer partial shade rather than direct sunlight.
- Lamb's Ear flowers in late spring and early summer, producing pink or white flowers.

Mexican Marigold:

- Mexican Marigold is a bushy evergreen shrub that grows up to 6 feet tall.
- You may notice the lovely aromatic smell coming from Mexican Marigold's leaves. The smell is very attractive to bees, butterflies and birds.
- This plant produces orange or yellow flowers all year round. The plants are used as an essential oil for perfume as well as a flavor agent in food industries.

Extreme Zone: Desert

The Extreme Zone showcases the diversity of life that exists in the world's most severe environments, like the desert, poles and deep sea vents. The Desert features plants that have adapted to live and thrive in arid conditions. Learn how plants like the Desert Agave and Brittlebush protect themselves from predators but also provide food and shelter within their environment.

Desert Agave:

- This plant usually grows in colonies, and individual plants can be several feet wide.
- It forms a rosette of thick grey-green leaves that help trap water and bring it down to the plants roots.
- Sharp spines along the edges of the leaves protect the plant from herbivorous animals, like the Desert Tortoise.
- Desert Agave grows a flowering stem up to 15 feet high and produces yellow flowers from late spring to early summer.

Brittlebush:

- This plant is a perennial shrub with simple triangular leaves and produces yellow flowers in spring.
- Lower stems on this plant are semi-succulent and store water.
- The leaves of the Brittlebush produce a substance toxic to other plants in its proximity.
- Plant stems exude a syrup-like resin whose sweet aroma has been used as incense.