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10
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4. Cactus Shrublands

In the parched heart of the Southwest, amidst a sea of sun-scorched earth, cactus shrublands emerge as thorny forests, a testament to life's resilience. These remarkable plants stand strong against harsh conditions, each uniquely adapted to survive. As we illustrate the beauty of these shrublands, we will unlock a fundamental artistic technique: building depth and composition through layering. By strategically stacking and positioning plants and other elements, you'll learn to create a sense of depth and dimension in your drawings. This technique shines in cactus shrublands, where the unique shapes and sizes of cacti offer endless opportunities for creative composition. Grab your pens and prepare to be amazed by the possibilities of layering. We'll delve into the fascinating world of cacti, exploring their diverse shapes, textures and spines. With each mindful line, you'll not only master the art of depicting these desert dwellers but also discover how to use them to create compositions that tell the stories of the cactus shrublands.

Here arid landscapes, sculpted by relentless winds and unforgiving sun, teem with an array of prickly inhabitants, each adapted to survive in this harsh environment.



Yucca

Yucca plants, with their tall, majestic forms and spiky leaves, add a touch of height and drama to any cactus shrubland scene. We'll build your yucca step by step, strategically layering spiky leaves and wispy flowers to create a desert dweller that stands out in your landscape composition.

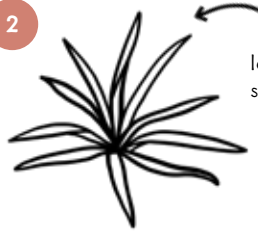
Start with three thin, pointy leaves coming out around a single point in the ground.

1



Mirror those leaves in the opposite direction for three leaves growing along the ground.

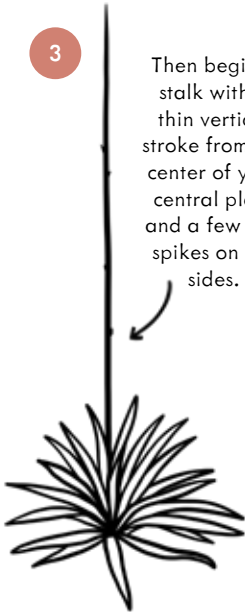
2



Draw more leaves sticking out sideways between the others.

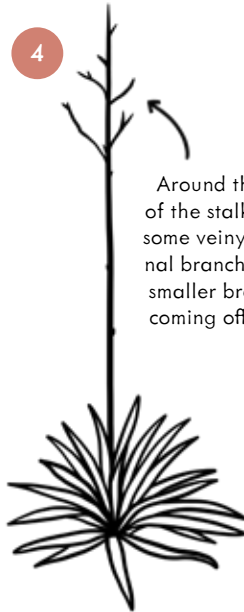
3

Then begin a stalk with a thin vertical stroke from the center of your central plant and a few tiny spikes on the sides.



4

Around the top of the stalk, draw some veiny diagonal branches with smaller branches coming off them.



5

Add a few more thin branches to connect your petals.



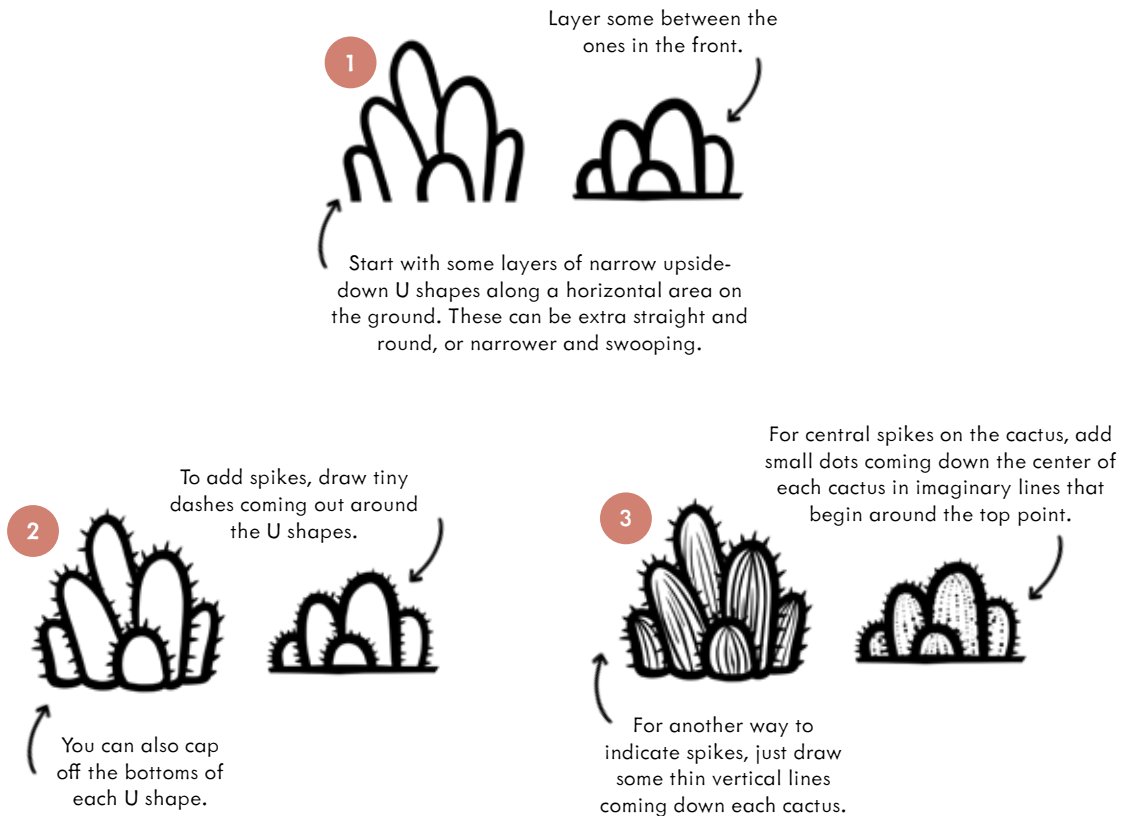
Continue to layer these thin pointy leaves all around your central plant, letting them overlap naturally.

Add loose petal shapes around these branches, letting some blow away with the wind; don't be afraid of making these too specific, because the more random they are the more natural it looks! For a further breakdown of these petals, start with an oval-like shape, draw a center line and layer curvy wavy petals around them.



Bunch Cactus

Bunch cacti, with their clustered forms and spiky textures, add a touch of character and variety to any cactus shrubland scene. We'll build them up layer by layer, starting with foundational shapes and adding spikes to bring these prickly veterans to life in your landscape composition.



Agave Plant

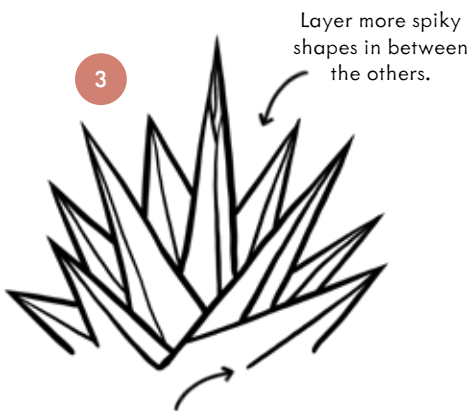
Agave plants, with their sharp, symmetrical forms, add a touch of diversity to any cactus shrubland scene. Building this agave step by step will strengthen your skills in layering for creating depth and texture.



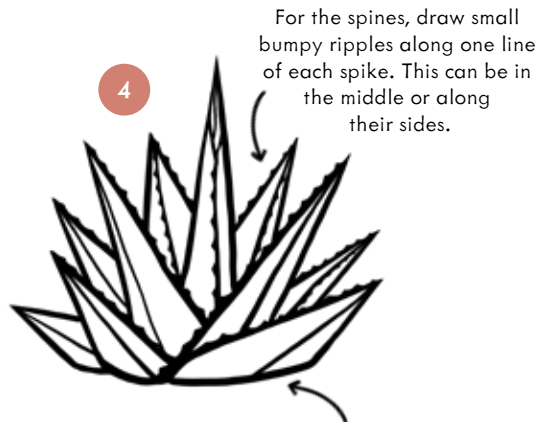
1
Start with an extra spiky shape that arches out around the ground with a central spike taller than the others.



2
Create an overlap in the middle with a Y shape. Connect the front spikes to the Y shape by continuing their diagonal lines to the center.



3
Layer more spiky shapes in between the others.
Add central lines down each of the spikes.

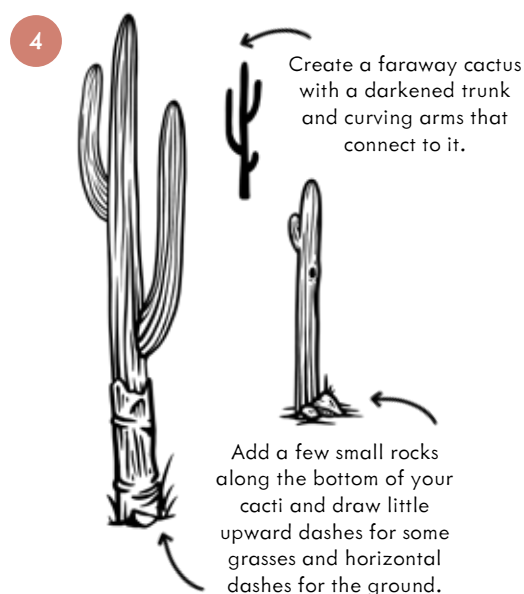
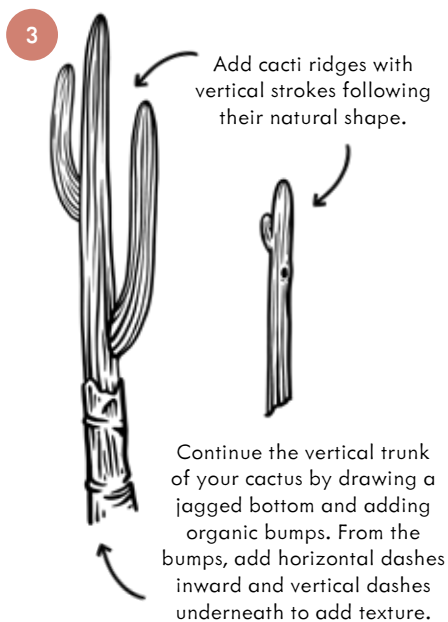
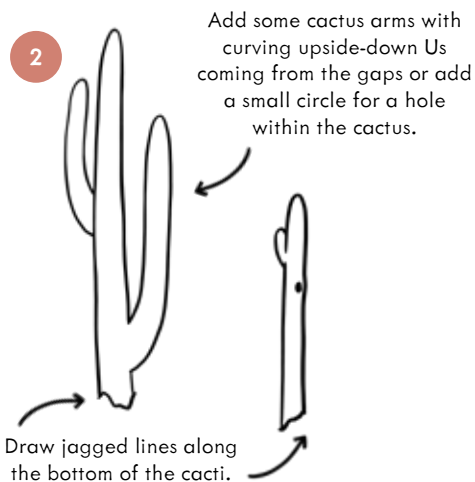
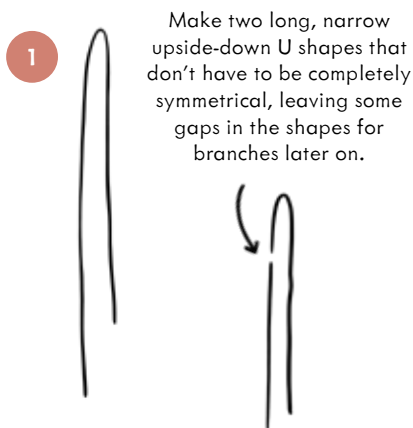


4
For the spines, draw small bumpy ripples along one line of each spike. This can be in the middle or along their sides.
Cap off the bottom shape with some rounded lines.



Saguaro

Desert giants reaching for the sky! Saguaro cacti, with their towering silhouettes and iconic branching arms, are the undisputed kings of the cactus shrubland and they will help you bring your layering skills to the next level! Learn how to create a sense of depth in your composition by incorporating background cacti and foreground elements, transforming these majestic giants into the focal point of your desert landscape.

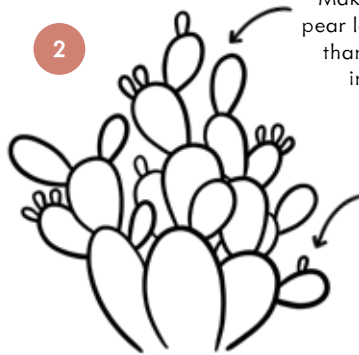


Prickly Pear

The prickly pear cactus! A true desert icon, it stands out amongst its spiny brethren with its unique flattened pads. The prickly pear boasts a fascinating structure of segmented “paddles” covered in a striking array of tiny spines. Let’s unlock the secrets of the prickly pear and bring its desert beauty to life!



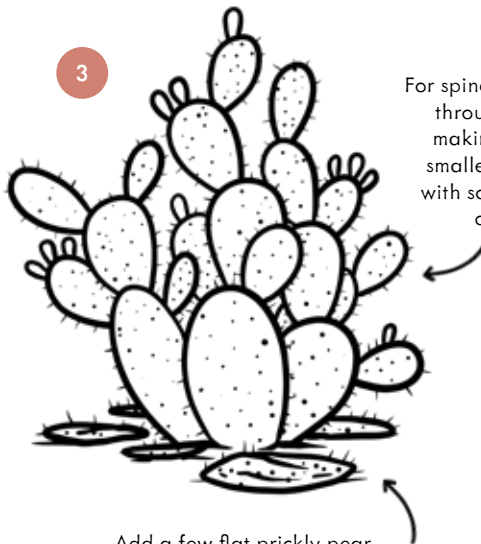
1 Start with three round, upside-down U shapes bunched together.



2 Layer more U shapes on the tops and sides of your initial bunch and build these upwards and slightly outwards in various shapes and sizes.

Make the upper prickly pear layers slightly smaller than the initial ones to indicate they are new growth.

Make cactus buds with tiny U shapes along a few of your prickly pear edges.



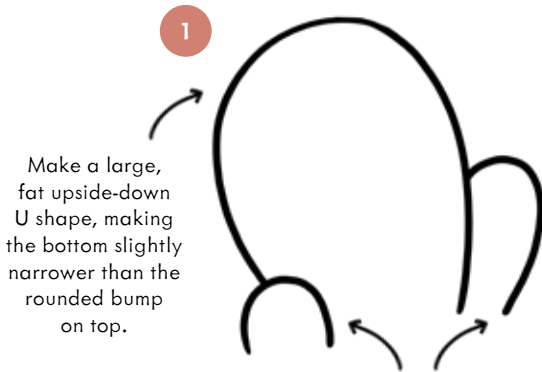
3 For spines, simply add dots randomly throughout your prickly pears, making some slightly bigger or smaller. Draw spikes sticking out with some thin dashes around the outline of your cactus.

Add a few flat prickly pear “paddles” that have fallen off around the bottom of your cactus.

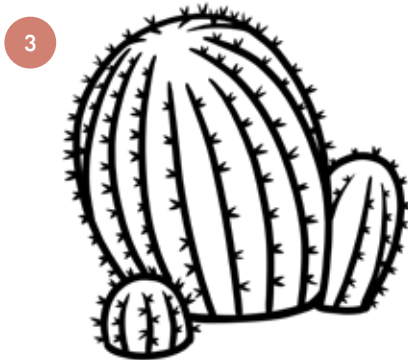
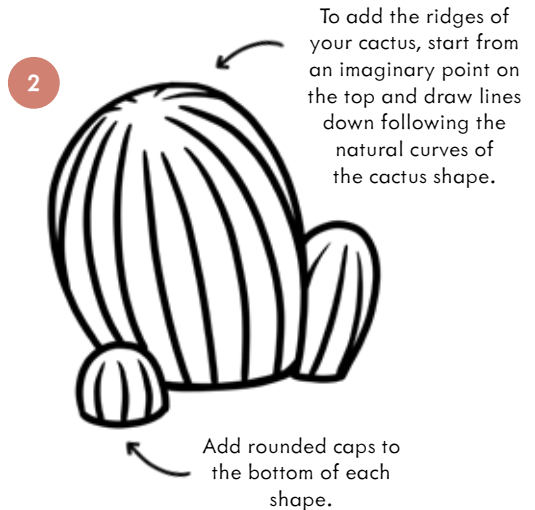


Barrel Cactus

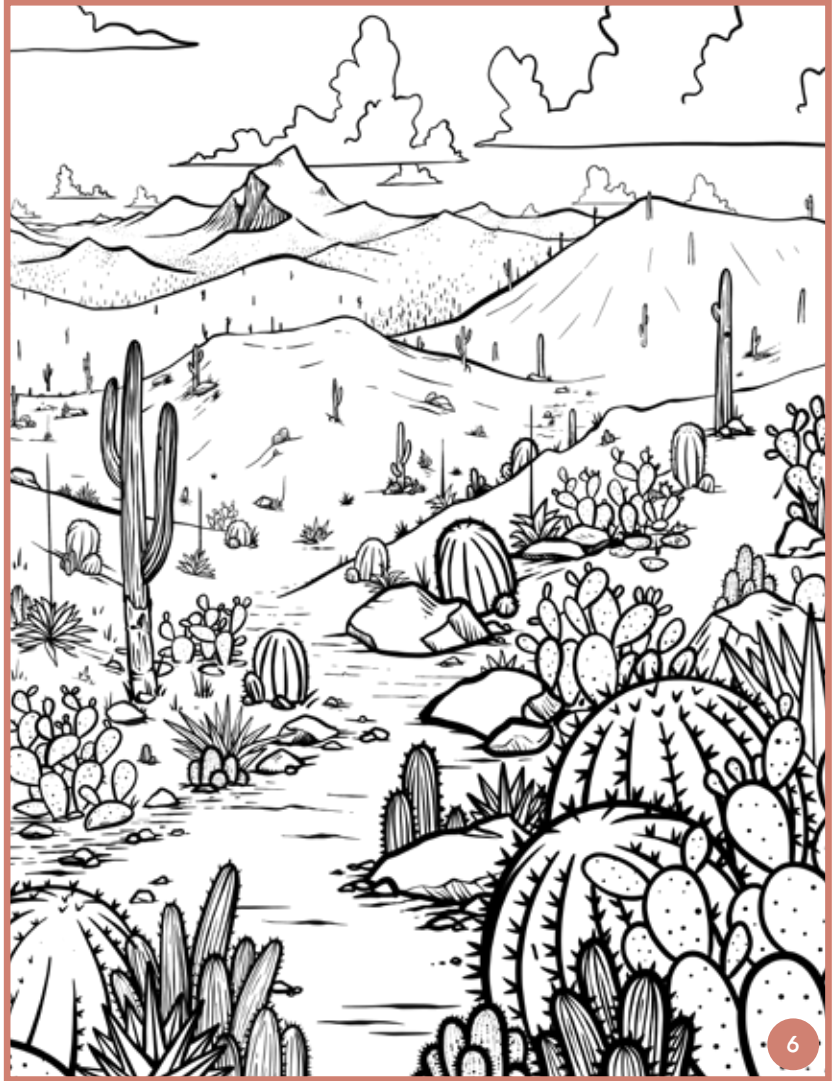
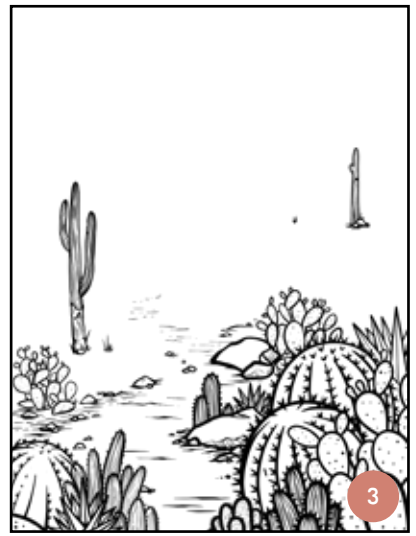
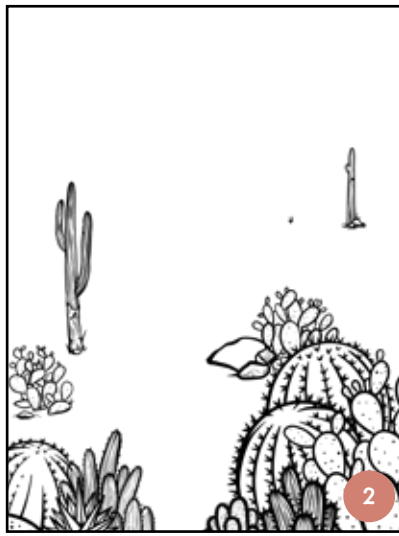
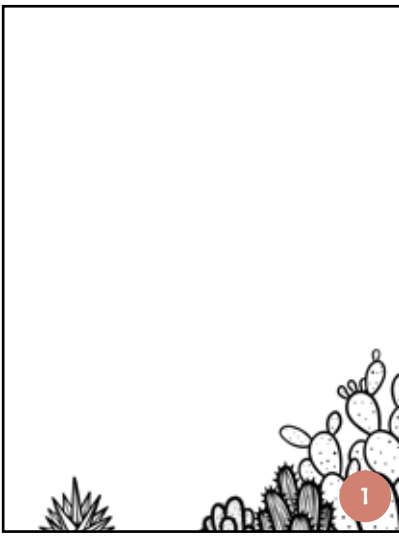
In the unforgiving desert landscape, the barrel cactus stands out. Forget the spindly silhouettes—this robust beauty boasts a unique, rounded body, perfectly adapted to the scorching sun. Wrapped in a crown of sharp spines, a testament to its desert toughness, the barrel cactus thrives with surprising efficiency.



Add half of an upside-down U to the side and a small squat one in the front.



Add spines along these ridges by drawing tiny Vs evenly spaced apart on the lines. Have them face towards the left side of the cactus on the left side, and towards the right on the right side.



Now, Let's Draw the Scene

(Sell full image on page 28)

1. Begin the foreground with an Agave Plant (page 32) and a Bunch Cactus (page 31). Layer the bottom right corner with another cactus and a Prickly Pear (page 34).

2. Continue to layer behind your plants with more cacti, prickly pears and some big Barrel Cacti (page 35). Add some Saguaro (page 33) slightly farther in the distance and be sure to leave some space around the center of the frame. Add a few rock shapes throughout.

3. Start to develop a sandy trail through the shrubland with small horizontal dashes following an imaginary curving line that gets smaller heading towards the horizon. Add more succulents and some small Rocks (page 13) along the trail as well.

4. As you continue building your shrubland around your trail with more of the same plants, add a hill shape on the right side of the frame.

5. Draw distant mountains with some wobbly horizontal lines across the background. Feel free to experiment with different sizes of peaks and valleys! Add details to your closest desert hills by drawing sloping lines with shrubs or rocks on top. Making the slopes follow the outline of the hill will help to add realistic texture, and some thin diagonal lines on other mountains will help to create steep cliff sides.

6. Follow up with an extensive cactus field by drawing saguaros on the mountains in the foreground, making them smaller and less detailed until they are tiny vague shapes dotted throughout the mountains in the background. Add depth to your tallest peak by shading the left mountain face with vertical lines.

Draw magnificent clouds by starting with a straight horizontal bottom then adding a puffy, wiggly shape above. Adding a few more puffy squiggles to the middle of the cloud gives it more shape. Create a truly endless desert sky by drawing much smaller clouds closer to the mountainous horizon!

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