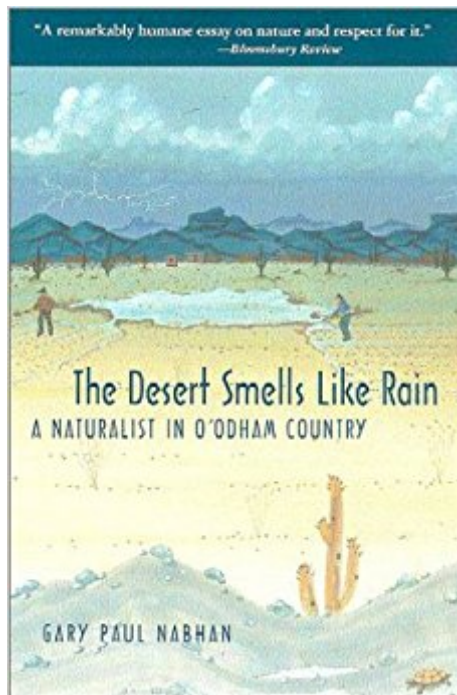




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# The Desert Smells Like Rain: A Naturalist In O'odham Country



## Synopsis

Longtime residents of the Sonoran Desert, the Tohono O'odham people have spent centuries living off the land—a land that most modern citizens of southern Arizona consider totally inhospitable. Ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan has lived with the Tohono O'odham, long known as the Papagos, observing the delicate balance between these people and their environment. Bringing O'odham voices to the page at every turn, he writes elegantly of how they husband scant water supplies, grow crops, and utilize wild edible foods. Woven through his account are coyote tales, O'odham children's impressions of the desert, and observations on the political problems that come with living on both sides of an international border. Whether visiting a sacred cave in the Baboquivari Mountains or attending a saguaro wine-drinking ceremony, Nabhan conveys the everyday life and extraordinary perseverance of these desert people in a book that has become a contemporary classic of environmental literature.

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## Customer Reviews

“People often find science boring and ill written. Not in this book. Here the reader is lured into botany, ethnology, hydrology, and a couple of million acres by vivid writing, good pictures, and a beautifully produced book. . . . Anyone ignorant of the desert should begin their cure here.”  
—Tucson Citizen  
“The humor, spice, charm, insight, and compassion with which Gary Paul Nabhan weaves his tale make for enjoyable reading.”  
—Rio Grande Sun  
“Nabhan’s point is that we transplanted desert dwellers have a great deal to learn from longtime,

environmentally conscious inhabitants if we are not to destroy our fragile home. . . . A remarkably humane essay on nature and respect for it.â "Bloomsbury Review" â "The Desert Smells Like Rain offers a remarkable insight, sensitive but unsentimental, combining the sound perceptions of a scientist with ecological concerns, matching humor and a sense of human frailty with tentative hope for the future.â "High Country News" â "His eyes are those of a scientist, his prose and vision a poet's: spare, evocative, respectful of both facts and mysteries.â "Orion Nature Quarterly

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Being a winter resident of this area of Arizona I learned a great deal about the Indian culture. Despite the book's having been written in the early 80's it is relevant today as the impotence of water conservation becomes greater than ever. I sent the book to my grandson, an environmental engineer senior, for the discussion of Indian agriculture was so interesting and informative.

does it job

I really liked the book. It was about real O'odham (formerly called Papago) Native Americans and how they lived in the Sonoran Desert.

I purchased this book as required reading for a Cultural Anthropology course I took. It's a short book but is a insightful view into the culture of the O'odham people. I enjoyed it and would recommend it to anyone.

If the title of this book speaks to you, if it evokes that luscious smell of Greasewood with hints of dirt, dragon's blood and Palo Verde, then do not miss this book. Besides the ethno-cultural aspects and insights into the Tohono O'odham and their culture, his lyrical writing about the Sonoran desert is a mindful retreat from where you sit reading. If you have lived his second paragraph: "The rains came that night - they changed the world." If this speaks you to, if it conjures up lost images and moments, then do not miss this book. You will have found a hidden treasure as subtle as the desert.

Nabhan gives us two perspectives on the O'odham. First, his training as a botanist exposes us to the O'odham use of wild species, both plant and animal. He also introduces us to ecology of the desert by showing how human use of an oasis interacts with its use by birds, providing details on population numbers and species. As a bonus he analyzes how the O'odham diet may relate to their diabetes. Second, he gives us a brief introduction to O'odham ethnography, and readers will find his description of the O'odham wine drinking (fertility) ceremony interesting although I would have appreciated his setting of the ritual in its larger context i.e. Mexico. Although the ceremony today is rare, or kept secret, it was common in the 1950s. For a fictional account of one based on numerous ethnographic accounts see, *IN SAGUARO'S SHADOW*. [ernestschusky.com](http://ernestschusky.com)

Gary Nabhan always writes richly, openly, insightfully. But this book is something special. He takes us into the rich, not usually so open, yet wonderful and deeply insightful minds of the native peoples of the desert southwest. It's a gentle tour de force.

My favorite Nabhan book, as a desert grasslands dweller, just the title spurs my imagination.

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