

Dry years

Wet year

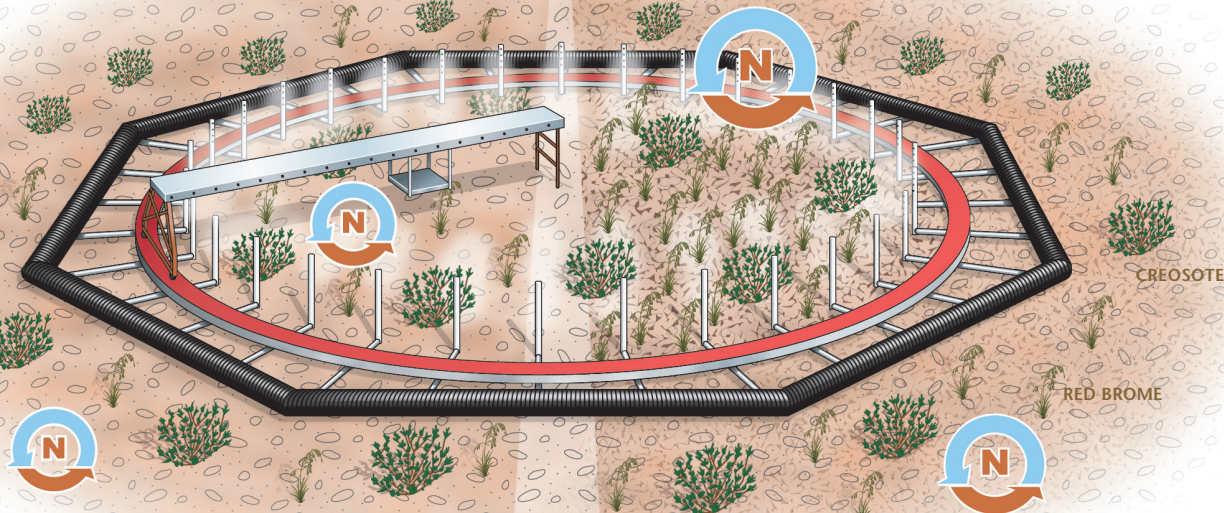


ILLUSTRATION BY AARON ASHLEY

At Dave Evans's study site in the Mojave Desert, plants and soil organisms took little note of added CO₂ during dry years (left). The big changes came in a year with high rainfall (right), which spurred the normally water-limited soil organisms to process more nitrogen.

But even with plenty of water and more nutrients available, the main plant beneficiaries were invasive such as red brome. The platform extending into the ring allowed Evans to gather samples without walking on the soil or disturbing the plants.