Cholla Cactus - New For 2026!

Opuntia cholla

Height: 9 feet

Spread: 12 feet

Sunlight: ○

Hardiness Zone: 5

Other Names: syn. Cylindropuntia imbricata, Cane Cholla

Group/Class: Cylindropuntia

Description:

The cholla cactus represents more than 20 species of the Optunia genus, with cylindrical stems; exceptional as an accent for rock gardens and planters; needs perfect drainage and sandy or gravelly soils

Ornamental Features

Cholla Cactus is a member of the cactus family, which are grown primarily for their characteristic shapes, their interesting features and textures, and their high tolerance for hot, dry growing environments. As an 'opuntiad' type of cactus, it doesn't actually have leaves, but rather modified succulent stems that comprise the bulk of the plant, and which are designed to retain water for long periods of time. This particular cactus is valued for its upright and spreading habit of growth on a plant consisting of long, narrow spiny grayish green segmented stems that form 'branches' which spread out from a central base. This plant has fuchsia cup-shaped flowers at the ends of the branches in mid summer, which are interesting on close inspection. The fruits are showy buttery yellow pomes displayed from mid fall to mid winter.



Cholla Cactus foliage
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



Cholla Cactus
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

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Landscape Attributes

Cholla Cactus is a large succulent evergreen plant with an upright spreading habit of growth. It commonly grows as a shrub-like plant with multiple 'branches' and stems. As a type of cactus, it has no true foliage; the body of the plant is wholly comprised of a linked series of spiny grayish green narrow cylindrical segments which are connected together to form the branches of the plant. With age, this plant will eventually develop a woody dark brown 'trunk' at its base.

This shrub will require occasional maintenance and upkeep, and should never be pruned except to remove any dieback, as it tends not to take pruning well. Stray segments or shoots can be carefully removed or thinned to control the overall form and spread of the plant. Deer don't particularly care for this plant and will usually leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Spiny

Cholla Cactus is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Hedges/Screening
- General Garden Use
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens

Planting & Growing

Cholla Cactus will grow to be about 9 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 12 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 1 foot from the ground, and is suitable for planting under power lines. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 30 years.

This plant should only be grown in full sunlight. It requires an extremely dry, well-drained growing location, and will usually die in standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for xeriscaping or the moisture-conserving landscape. It is not particular as to soil pH, but grows best in sandy soils. It is quite intolerant of urban pollution, therefore inner city or urban streetside plantings are best avoided. This species is native to parts of North America. It can be propagated by division.