



ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM PLANT CARE INFORMATION

Indian Fig Prickly Pear *Opuntia ficus-indica*

DESCRIPTION: Indian Fig is a species of prickly pear that has long been a domesticated crop plant important in agricultural economies throughout arid and semiarid parts of the world. It is thought probably to have originated in Mexico. In Mexican Spanish, the plant is called *nopal*, while the fruit is called *tuna*. Jams and jellies are produced from the fruit, which resemble strawberries and figs in color and flavor. Mexicans have used *Opuntia* for thousands of years to make an alcoholic drink called *colonche*. Mexican and other southwestern residents eat the young cactus pads (*nopales*, plural, *nopal*, singular), usually picked before the tiny spines harden. They are sliced into strips, skinned or unskinned, and fried with eggs and jalapeños, served as a breakfast treat. They have a texture and flavor like string beans or okra. Another use of the plant is as an ingredient in adobe to bind and waterproof roofs. Many prickly pear species including this one have been cultivated to serve as a host plant for cochineal insects, which produce desirable red and purple dyes, a practice dating to the pre-Columbian era.

RECOMMENDED USE: A great accent or specimen for its form. It can be used as a screen or living fence.

CULTURE:



Hardiness: Can withstand upper teens, but pads may break off at 20°F



Sun tolerance: Best in full sun to very light shade.



Watering and feeding: Low water use. Fertilizing not necessary.



Soil requirements: Any soil will do.



Pruning: As needed to control.