

= *Cylindropuntia imbricata* =

The cane cholla (or walking stick cholla , tree cholla , chainlink cactus , etc .) (*Cylindropuntia imbricata*) is a cactus found in the Southwestern United States and northern Mexico , including some cooler regions in comparison to many other cacti . It occurs primarily in the arid regions of the Southwestern United States in the states of Oklahoma , Texas , New Mexico , Arizona and Nevada . It is often conspicuous because of its shrubby or even tree @-@ like size , its silhouette , and its long @-@ lasting yellowish fruits .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The cane cholla 's range is the arid regions of Nevada , Arizona , New Mexico , Oklahoma , and Texas , south to Durango , Zacatecas , and San Luis Potosí . It occurs at altitudes from 1 @, @ 200 to 2 @, @ 300 m (3 @, @ 900 to 7 @, @ 500 ft) and is hardy for a cactus (USDA Zone 5A) .

In parts of its range , often just below the pinyon @-@ juniper belt , it can be abundant , surrounded by low grasses and forbs that are brown most of the year ; in such places chollas are conspicuous as the only tall green plant . Plants may form thickets or be spaced at a few times their width in " gardens " .

The species is naturalised in Australia in old mining localities and along watercourses . It is known there by the common names of Devil 's rope cactus or Devil 's rope pear . It is a declared noxious weed in New South Wales and also occurs in Queensland , Victoria and South Australia .

= = Description = =

The above @-@ ground part consists of much @-@ branched cylindrical stems , the end joints being about 3 cm in diameter . The joints , unlike those of some chollas , are hard to detach . The stems are highly tubercular (lumpy) with a pattern of long oval lumps . A typical height is about 1 m , but exceptionally it can grow to 4 @. @ 6 m (15 ft) with a " trunk " diameter of 25 cm (9 @. @ 8 in) . The width is often similar to or somewhat greater than the height . The stems are armed with clusters of up to about 10 red to pink spines , which may be 3 cm (1 @. @ 2 in) long and are barbed and sharp enough to easily penetrate leather gardening gloves . The stems and fruits also have many spines or " glochids " about 1 mm long that can detach and stick in the skin .

There are two kinds of stems or " cladodes " : long plagiotropic , bearing flowers at the ends and falling off after a few years , and long orthotropic , primarily serving for support and transport and staying on the plant . Plagiotropic stems grow in a star- or crown @-@ like pattern around a central orthotropic stem . This species blooms in late spring or early summer . The flowers are purple or magenta , rarely rose @-@ pink , about 5 cm (2 @. @ 0 in) wide . The fruits are yellowish , tubercular like the stems , and shaped something like the frustum of a cone , with a hollow at the wide end where the flower fell off ; they are often mistaken for flowers . The plant retains them all winter . They are dry and not tasty , though the Indians of Arizona and New Mexico are said to have eaten them .

In addition to sexual reproduction , the tree cholla reproduces when stem joints fall to the ground and take root . Thus this species spreads and its spread is hard to control , especially where animals defecate seeds and carry stem joints stuck to their hide some distance from the parent plant . (Some cows , " cholla eaters " , learn to eat cholla fruits despite the pain .) " Waves of invasion " typically occur four or five years after drought combined with grazing , probably because this combination exposes soil on which the stem joints can take root .

= = Ecology = =

The fruits are also eaten by various wild birds and mammals , including pronghorn , desert bighorn sheep , and deer . The thorny plants provide escape for cover for many small animals .

The leafcutter bee *Lithurgus apicalis* has been observed to pollinate the flowers .

= = Uses = =

The plants are sometimes grown as ornamentals . Dead stems decay to leave a hollow wooden tube with a pattern of lengthwise slits . These are sometimes used as canes or to make curios . The Roman Catholic Penitentes of New Mexico formerly tied fresh stems to their bare backs in Holy Week processions . The Zuni people use the *imbricata* variety ceremonially .

= = Images = =