PLANT FACT SHEET

# *Opuntia ficus-indica* (L.) Mill.

**GENUS** *Opuntia* **FAMILY** Cactaceae

**COMMON NAMES** Sweet prickly pear, Indian fig

## EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

**Edible parts:** Fruit, Seeds, Stems, Leaves, Vegetable, Flowers

The ripe fruit are eaten. Dried fruit are used in sweetmeats. They are also used for jams, jellies and wines.
The young stems are used as a vegetable or in pickles.
The fermented pulp is mixed with flour and nuts to make and Italian dish.
The pulp of the fruit without seeds is prepared as a sauce for pasta. They are also stewed or dried for later use.
The green fruit and tender shoots are cooked in curries. They can be eaten in soups and stews to add a mucilaginous character. The segments and fruit can be flamed to remove the spines and hairs.

## DESCRIPTION

A tree like cactus. It grows to 2-5 m tall. It has many branches. It is spreading and bluish-green. It has succulent pads. The joints are 20-40 cm long by 10-20 cm wide. The spines are 2-3 cm long. Spineless kinds also occur. The flowers are large and yellow. They grow on the borders of the pads. The flowers open in the daytime. They are 70-100 mm long. The filaments are pale yellow. The fruit are barrel shaped. They are 50-90 mm long. They turn yellow when ripe. There are several seeds. There are several cultivated varieties.

## HABITAT

It is native to Mexico. It suits drier places. It needs full sunlight. It needs a temperature above 10°C. It is grown in tropical and subtropical areas. It can grow in arid places. It grows naturally on sandy sea shores. In East Africa it grows below 1,700 m altitude. In Argentina it grows from sea level to 2,500 m above sea level. It suits hardiness zones 9-11. In Sichuan and Yunnan.

## PRODUCTION

### Cultivation

Plants are grown from stem pads. They can grow easily from sections which fall onto the ground. Plants can be grown from seeds, by division of the roots or by planting segments.

### Harvesting and Seed Production

It takes 5-6 years to fruit when grown from seeds. Fruit matures in 90 days. Fruit can be collected all year round.

## NOTES

There are about 250 Opuntia species. It can be invasive. Fruit are high in folates 24µg/100.

## PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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