

Hylocereus undatus

[Synonyms : *Cereus triangularis*, *Cereus tricostatus*, *Cereus trigonus* var. *guatemalensis*, *Cereus undatus*, *Hylocereus guatemalensis*, *Hylocereus ocamponis*, *Hylocereus tricostatus*]

STRAWBERRY PEAR is a climbing cactus. Of unknown origin (but believed to be native to tropical America) it has large, fragrant funnel-shaped flowers with white inner petals, greenish-yellow outer petals and many conspicuous protruding cream stamens.

It is also known as Belle of the night, Cinderella plant, Dragon fruit, Dragon pearl fruit, Dragon's eye, *Flor de cáliz* (Spanish), Honolulu queen, Lady of the night, Nightblooming cactus, Nightblooming cereus, *Pa-nani-o-ka* (Hawaiian), *Pitahaya blanca* (Mexican), *Pitahaya de cardón* (Guatemalan), Pitaya (English and Spanish), Queen of the night, and Red pitaya.

Although the flowerbuds open quickly, the transition to the fully open state is sufficiently slow for this to be able to be seen by the naked eye. The flowers open at about 8 pm. local time and close the following day at about 10 am. when they wilt, droop and close in the heat of the sun. [In Hawaii they bloom 4 or 5 times between June and October every 10-14 days.]

Flowers are pollinated by bees and ants.

Undatus is derived from Latin *unda* (water in motion, wave) meaning 'wavy or waved' with reference to the wings on the stems.

The ripe sweetish-tasting somewhat shiny, bright-red to yellow fruit that are sold in local markets (especially in Mexico) can be eaten raw and the juice can be used to make a refreshing drink. The fruit are also used to prepare a syrup employed for colouring confectionery.

The cactus is not only cultivated in the Caribbean, Mexico, Florida in the southern United States and Hawaii but also in countries in the Old World as both a fruit and an ornamental plant – even as a hedge over walls. A prized example of this latter occurs in the capital of Hawaii, Honolulu. The story goes that in about 1830 the brigantine *Ivanhoe*, out of Boston and making for Canton on the other side of the Pacific, called in at a Mexican port (probably Acapulco) before sailing on to Hawaii. There various plants were taken on board but most of them were destined to be dumped when they died during the next leg of the journey. It was the then First Officer, Captain Charles Brewer, who noticed that the strawberry pear still showed signs of life when they reached Hawaii and saved it from the watery depths. He is said to have presented the cactus to a missionary teacher and it was planted in Honolulu. Here it thrived so well that its cuttings cultivated throughout the islands made it the common sight it is today. A 'prized example' must be the boundary of a college in the capital. The grandmother of a well-known American senator from Connecticut, Mrs. Hiram Bingham is credited with planting the strawberry pear by the college's stone wall before 1840 and the cactus obliged by clothing the wall for about half a mile – a length that can produce 5,000 flowers in one night – an awe-inspiring sight (and scent). Hawaii introduced a law which was still being adhered to in the first half of the 20th Century that forbade anyone from picking the blooms before 10 pm. in order to enable everyone, not least visitors, to enjoy the sight of these large and exotic flowers.

Authorities note that in China strawberry pear provides both food and medicine.