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Opuntia imbricata

[Synonyms : *Cereus imbricatus*, *Cylindropuntia imbricata*, *Opuntia arborescens*, *Opuntia vexans*]

CHAIN-LINK CACTUS is a cactus. Native to south-western United States and to Mexico, it has purple flowers.

It is also known as Candelabrum cholla, Cane cactus, Cane cholla, Devil's rope, Mexican cholla, Tree cactus, Tree cane cactus, Tree cholla, Tree cholla cactus, Tuna, and Walkingstick cholla.

In colder weather this cactus can turn purplish.

Warning – the many minute barbed pink to reddish-brown hairs that cover the cactus can cause considerable discomfort if they pierce flesh.

Imbricata is derived from Latin *imbricis* (hollow roof tile) meaning 'closely and evenly overlapping like roof tiles'.

Local North American Indian tribes, including the Acoma and Laguna have dried and stored the young pads (segments) de-prickled, for Winter food. Also after carefully removing any spines they have eaten the more mature pads raw or cooked. Unripe fruit (carefully checked to ensure the absence of spines or minute hairs) were added to soups – and the warty ripe yellow fruit similarly processed were also eaten raw or cooked (and were dried for later use too). Roasted and ground, the tiny seeds provided a food thickening.

The thorns were strong and long enough to be used by local Indian tribes as needles for tattooing and sewing.

Locally the dye obtained from the cochineal insect has long been fixed with a filtered extract made from these chopped boiled fruit.

Woody stem parts have not only been used to make canes but also, when dried, have provided ready-made torches.

The cactus was introduced to Australia where it is viewed as a noxious weed in many regions of that Country. It can also be a nuisance even in its homeland in areas which have been overgrazed thus allowing it to overrun.