

## *Brasiliopuntia brasiliensis* (Willd) A. Berger

### I. PRELIMINARY MATTERS

The Cactus of the Month was sold to me at a Lowes on Kirkwood Road in Houston. The plant had a label prepared by Cactus Collection.com stating that the name of the cactus is Argentine *Opuntia/Opuntia argentiniana*.

I checked this in my collection of books on cacti and succulents and found that there was a cactus named *Opuntia argentina* in a 1991 reference book titled *Cactus: Over 1200 Species Illustrated and Identified* by expert authors the late Clive Innes and the late Charles Glass. But further research in LLife Encyclopedias of Living Forms: Cacti; the National Gardening Association Plants Database; and the IUCN [International Union for the Conservation of Nature] Red List demonstrated that my cactus has an accepted name as stated above: *Brasiliopuntia brasiliensis* (Willd) A. Berger.



I recommend the IUCN Red List publication (see References, below) to determine an accepted cactus name and a large volume of information on range, habitat, synonyms, threatened status if any, and other useful information.

## II. SYNONYMS; COMMON NAMES

*B. brasiliensis* has 25 synonyms beside *Opuntia argentiniana* Griseb. and *Opuntia brasiliensis*. The long list of synonyms can be found in the IUCN Red List article on this species. The National Gardening Association Plants Database lists one common name for this cactus: Brazilian Pricklypear.

## III. HABITAT; DISTRIBUTION

The best source of information on habitat and distribution of this cactus are found in the IUCN Red List article, including a map of South America with the distribution illustrated, and a detailed list of habitats, including some terminology apparently in Brazilian that I could not translate. Also a good source is Kew Plants of the World Online. In general, the distribution is northeast Argentina; Bolivia; north, NE, southern, SE, and west-central Brazil; Paraguay; Peru, and Uruguay (source: Kew Plants of the World Online). The species has been introduced into the USA (Florida).

The *CSSA Journal* of May 2009 published an article titled “Odd Opuntias” by Root Gorlick pointing out that *B. brasiliensis* grows at the periphery of dense forests grows at the periphery of dense forests in Brazil, starting with the fast-growing cylindrical trunk from which extrude flat pads and occasional cylindrical branches. The trunk bolts vertically to escape shade thrown by nearby plants. Gorlick opines that *B. brasiliensis* may be the tallest freestanding cactus species. The IUCN Red List and adds that this species can be found in the Atlantic forests of Brazil and supratidal rocky areas (inland cliffs, mountain peaks, and forest), and westward to the eastern drainage of the Andes.

## IV. DESCRIPTION

LLifle describes this cactus as a tree-like perennial with pads off a straight, green, round stem that can reach 9 meters (30 feet) high. The plant has mostly horizontal or declining branches bearing bright-green, spiny, flattened, oval pads. If the plant is kept in a pot, it likely will remain small and bushy. In spring-summer the plant bears pale-yellow flowers but only when the plant is two-to-three feet tall.

## V. CULTIVATION/GROWTH

This species is a spring/summer grower and can do well in full sun or partial sun. It should be cultivated in well-drained cactus mix and watered only when completely dry. In winter it should be brought inside to the brightest window available (east, southwest or western exposure). In deep tropical climates it can be grown as a hedge or tree, but the Consulta Plantas website warns that the minimum temperature should not go below 7 degrees C or 44 degrees F. If pot-grown it will remain fairly small.



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## VI. USES

This plant is sold and used as medicine in its native habitat. I have no more details.

## VII. IUCN RED LIST STATUS

The IUCN reports this plant is of least concern despite destruction of some of its native habitat by agriculture and commercial use. The last Red List review dates to 2010, and additional study is needed according to IUCN.

## VIII. AVAILABILITY

Cactus King advertises *B. brasiliensis* for sale. Lowes offered the plant at one store on Kirkwood in Houston but had only one plant on display, which I bought. There are numerous sources for this plant online. Examples of sources: [rootedinparadisess.com](http://rootedinparadisess.com); [toptropicals.com](http://toptropicals.com); [plantdesert.com](http://plantdesert.com); and [succulentcity.com](http://succulentcity.com); among others.

## IX. REFERENCES

Innes, Clive and Glass, Charles. Cacti. New York: Portland House, 1991

Kew Plants of the World Online: <https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:Isid:ipni.org:names:129102-1>

LLifle Encyclopedia of Living Forms: [http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/6150/Brasiliopuntia\\_brasiliensis](http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/6150/Brasiliopuntia_brasiliensis)

IUCN Red List on *B. brasiliensis*: <https://www.iuredlist.org/species/46517/121439029>

National Gardening Association Plants Database: <https://garden.org/plantsview/117836/Brazilian-Prickly-pear-brasiliopuntia-brasiliensis/>

Root Gorlick: "Odd Opuntias" in Cactus and Succulent Journal 81(3) , 162 (1 May 2009): <https://doi.org/10.2985/015.081.0312>

Consulta Plantas: <https://consultplantas.com/index.php/en/care-plants-from-a-to-c/1761-brasiliopuntia-brasiliensis-or-brazilian-prickley-pear-care-and-growing>

