

## February Cactus of the Month

Gina Coli3n

### Opuntia Sunburst

Whether potted in a container garden or as part of the in-ground landscape, the Opuntia Starburst is a striking cactus.

**Plant Family:** Cactacea

**Botanical Name:** *Opuntia cochenillifera* 'Sunburst' variegated

**Common Name:** Cochineal nopal cactus

**Habitat/Distribution:** According to Tula.house and Planetdesert.com, the *Opuntia Sunburst Variegata* is not naturally occurring. Although it is native to Mexico, cultivation is widely distributed across the Americas and Asia.



**Description:** The *Opuntia Sunburst* cactus pictured is from my collection and is a standard representation of the type. It has branched pads and the variegation is a combination of vibrant yellow with deep rich green flecks, bursts, and waves. It is non-toxic to humans and pets. While it is easier to handle because glochids are spaced out and the spines are clearly visible, caution should still be used. To keep the vibrant variegation, full sun for at least 5 hours is optimal. However, it will also do well with partial shade. Vibrant pink to red flowers will appear in late spring

to early summer.



### Maintenance:

**Sun** - Full sun for a minimum of 5 hours.

**Soil** - While cactus potting soil can be purchased, a gritty well-draining mix is optimal. This can be done by adding up to 50% of other ingredients such as a mixture of perlite, chicken grit, pumice, sand, or volcanic rock.

**Temperature** - This cactus prefers warmer temperatures, above 70°F with winter temperatures between 40°F - 50°F.

**Water** - The *Opuntia Sunburst* cactus is drought tolerant. Wait until the soil is completely dry then fully saturate. During winter months, water once every 4 – 6 weeks. Note: When in doubt, it is better to under-water. Over watering can cause rot.

**Cultivation:** It can be easily propagated with branch cuttings. Select a pad that is healthy. Using a sharp and sterile blade, make a clean cut. Sprinkle the cut with your product of choice to prevent fungus and diseases. (I have used both sulfur and cinnamon on cactus cuttings). Both have worked well.) Allow the cut to dry, heal and callous. This usually takes a few days. Once the cut is healed/calloused, it can be planted. (While I have not tried it, a rooting hormone is optional)

**My experience:** I acquired my *Opuntia Sunburst* in late summer of 2022 and did not get an opportunity to see it bloom. However, the unique variegation still makes this one of my favorite cacti. It requires little to no maintenance. During the December 2022 freezing temperatures in the teens, it did just fine in a portable greenhouse that was heated intermittently throughout the day, with no heating throughout the night. It is still in the original purchase pot, and I have not decided if I am going to keep it in a pot by itself or mix it with other cacti and succulents. Either way, the unique beauty of the variegation makes it a star (or in this case, a sunburst!)



#### REFERENCES:

1. <https://tula.house/blogs/tulas-plant-library/opuntia-cochenillifera-sunburst-variegated>
2. <https://planetdesert.com/products/opuntia-sunburst-variegata-cactus-cacti-unique-succulent-live-plant>
3. <https://succulentplantcare.com/how-to-easily-root-and-propagate-a-cactus/>