Sheathed Cholla

Cylindropuntia tunicata

Height: 24 inches

Spread: 4 feet

Sunlight: ○

Hardiness Zone: 7b

Other Names: Thistle Cholla, syn. Opuntia tunicata

Group/Class: Cylindropuntia

Description:

A variable, shrubby cactus featuring unique, stem-like, cylindrical growth instead of the usual pads; stems topped with striking yellow flowers in spring, followed by greenish-yellow fruits; covered in sharp white spines, so site and handle carefully

Ornamental Features

Sheathed Cholla is a member of the cactus family, which are grown primarily for their characteristic shapes, their interesting features and textures, and their high tolerance for hot, dry growing environments. As an 'opuntiad' type of cactus, it doesn't actually have leaves, but rather modified succulent stems that comprise the bulk of the plant, and which are designed to retain water for long periods of time. This particular cactus is valued for its mounded habit of growth on a plant consisting of long, narrow spiny grayish green segmented stems that form 'branches' which spread out from a central base. This plant features showy yellow cup-shaped flowers at the ends of the branches from late spring to early summer. It features an abundance of magnificent yellow berries with chartreuse hints from late summer to mid fall.



Sheathed Cholla
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



Sheathed Cholla
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Landscape Attributes

Sheathed Cholla is a succulent evergreen plant with a generally mounded habit of growth. It commonly grows as a shrub-like plant with multiple 'branches' and stems. As a type of cactus, it has no true foliage; the body of the plant is wholly comprised of a linked series of spiny grayish green narrow cylindrical segments which are connected together to form the branches of the plant. With age, this plant will eventually develop a woody brown 'trunk' at its base.

This shrub will require occasional maintenance and upkeep, and should never be pruned except to remove any dieback, as it tends not to take pruning well. Stray segments or shoots can be carefully removed or thinned to control the overall form and spread of the plant. Deer don't particularly care for this plant and will usually leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Spiny

Sheathed Cholla is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- Rock/Alpine Gardens
- General Garden Use
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Sheathed Cholla will grow to be about 24 inches tall at maturity, with a spread of 4 feet. It has a low canopy. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 20 years.

This plant should only be grown in full sunlight. It requires an extremely dry, well-drained growing location, and will usually die in standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for a low-water garden or xeriscape application. Like most succulents and cacti, this plant prefers to grow in poor soils and should therefore never be fertilized. It is not particular as to soil pH, but grows best in sandy soils. It is quite intolerant of urban pollution, therefore inner city or urban streetside plantings are best avoided. This species is native to parts of North America.

Sheathed Cholla makes a fine choice for the outdoor landscape, but it is also well-suited for use in outdoor pots and containers. It can be used either as 'filler' or as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination, depending on the height and form of the other plants used in the container planting. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when grown in a container, it may not perform exactly as indicated on the tag - this is to be expected. Also note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.