California Barrel Cactus

Ferocactus cylindraceus



California Barrel Cactus
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 3 feet

Spread: 24 inches

Sunlight: ○

Hardiness Zone: 9

Other Names: Desert Barrel Cactus, Echinocactus cylindraceus

Description:

A slow growing, gray-green barrel shaped cactus displaying prominent ribs adorned with red spines that mature to gray; bright lemon yellow flowers from late spring to summer on mature specimens in full sun; becomes more cylindrical with age

Ornamental Features

California Barrel Cactus 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. Like all cacti, it doesn't actually have leaves, but rather modified succulent stems that comprise the bulk of the plant, and which are designed to hold water for long periods of time. This particular cactus is valued for its distinctive barrel shape, and usually grows as a single spiny ribbed grayish green stem. This plant has lemon yellow cup-shaped flowers held atop the stems from late spring to early summer, which emerge from distinctive plum purple flower buds, and which are interesting on close inspection.

Landscape Attributes

California Barrel Cactus is a succulent evergreen plant with a characteristic upright barrel shape. It tends to grow as a solitary entity comprised of a single stem, and it doesn't usually spread laterally. As a type of cactus, it has no true foliage; the body of the plant is wholly comprised of a spiny grayish green stem which is prominently ribbed.

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, and should never be pruned except to remove any dieback, as it tends not to take pruning well. 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;

- Insects
- Spiny

California Barrel Cactus is recommended for the following landscape applications;

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

Planting & Growing

California Barrel Cactus will grow to be about 3 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 24 inches. It is often grown as either a solitary specimen or in combination with other complementary plants as part of a garden composition. It grows at a slow rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 40 years or more.

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 somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This species is native to parts of North America. It can be propagated by division.

California Barrel Cactus is a fine choice for the garden, but it is also a good selection for planting in outdoor pots and containers. Because of its height, it is often used as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.