

March 2018 Plant of the Month

Beavertail Cactus

Opuntia basilaris

Plant Form: Cactus

Water Use: Extremely Low

Mature Size: 1-2 ft. tall x 3-6 ft. wide

Exposure: Full Sun

Bloom Time: Spring (Mar-May), Summer (June)

Native to: California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Mexico
(below 7000 feet)

Hardiness: Cold Hardy to 10°F

Beavertail Cactus has flattened pads that truly resemble their namesake. This slow-growing California native from both the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts is dotted with clusters of tiny spines called glochids, which are set into dimples across the pads (making the pads look like a beaver's tail). A single plant may have hundreds of blue-gray, succulent, flattened pads, which can become wrinkled in summer, but plump after rains. Hot-pink flowers in spring are stunning – and are irresistible to beetles and other pollinators. Individual pads may be transplanted to extend plantings. While being extremely low-maintenance and easy to grow, it dislikes clay soils, acid soils, shade, and too much watering. Water rarely if at all. Always wear gloves when working with or around this beauty, and keep it away from pathways. Desert rodents and birds eat the tiny black seeds. This low-growing groundcover compliments and accents rock and succulent gardens, wildlife gardens, and dry washes.

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