

Opuntia basilaris Engelm. & J. M. Bigel. var. *basilaris*, BEAVERTAIL PRICKLY PEAR.

Subshrub, stem-succulent, fibrous-rooted, several-stemmed at base, with photosynthetic stems, irregularly branched, decumbent or dieback with erect terminal stems, in range 10–30 cm tall; shoots = a series of flattened stem segments (cladodes, pads, joints), narrowly constricted between segments, cladodes not breaking apart, to 2 cladodes tall, lacking clusters of permanent radiating leaf spines at all nodes on stem surface; lacking hard wood.

Stems: cladodes obovate in outline, in range 60–200 × 50–110 mm, typically 10–15 mm thick mid-cladode, with helically arranged, low tubercles (\approx modified leaf bases) and associated areoles (spine-bearing short shoots) in the axils; tubercles \pm domelike on new cladode becoming \pm flattened, appearing glabrous but with a minute white papillae on each cell, initially blue-green and purplish and also glaucous, aging dark and somewhat necrotic in appearance or wrinkled horizontally; areole roundish, in range 2 mm diameter, covered with tannish woolly hairs aging brown; flesh (cortex and pith) watery and mucilaginous.

Leaves: helically alternate, simple, sessile, without stipules, dimorphic; cauline leaves short-lived on newly emerging shoots, narrowly conic compressed somewhat on surface next to stem, 2–2.4 × 0.7 mm, fleshy, pale green, sharp-pointed at tip, arching toward the cladode tip, abscising during shoot expansion; leaf spines on areoles (= modified type of leaf), of only 1 form = deciduous glochids, not photosynthetic; glochids barbed at tip, irritating in skin, formed in a dense, erect cluster in center of areole, in range typically 2–3 mm long, beige aging golden.

Inflorescence: flowers solitary, axillary on areole (areole dies after flowering), sessile, with ovary covered with stem tissue hence having tubercles, glochid-bearing areoles, and short-lived cauline leaves. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 60–70 mm across; **perianth** of ca. 35 segments, segments free, helically arranged, overlapping, unequal, in a graded series from short, green and reddish purple, fleshy, hemi-lanceoloid and hemi-ovoid outer segments 8–9 mm long to larger segments with membranous and petal-like margins eventually to the longest, fully petaloid, fan-shaped inner segments 27–29 × 18–27 mm, inner segments brilliant purple-pink, firmly attached, all segments abscised as a unit with stamens from developing fruit forming a deep, inversely deltoid depression; **stamens** > 200, free, formed on a steeply sloped axis, at anthesis erect but some filaments crooked; filaments 8.5–10 mm long and deep purplish-red (the outermost stamens) grading to 5.5–6 mm long and light purplish-red (the innermost stamens); anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, 3–3.2 mm long, light yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen light yellow; **pistil** 1; ovary inferior and embedded in receptacle (stem tissue), bell-shaped, ca. 30 × 21–23 mm, minutely white-papillate, with ca. 25 low to flat tubercles, bearing ephemeral, papillate, reddish purple, lanceoloid leaves 3–5 mm long, the areoles \pm round, with dense tuft of light brown hairs and orange to reddish glochids 2–3 mm long weakly attached at base and aging brown; ovary 1-chambered, with ca. 25 ovules attached to outer wall, chamber narrowly cylindrical in longitudinal section, ca. 10 × 4 mm, ovary wall thick and mucilaginous; style inversely club-shaped, ca. 14 × 3 mm below stigma, mostly creamy white but light pink beneath stigmas, surrounded by sunken, cup-shaped nectary chamber; stigmas exerted several mm above central anthers, = ca. 7 fleshy, fingerlike, incurved lobes 2–3 mm long, white, weakly papillate and lacking a colorless hair projecting near tip. **Fruit:** berry, dry and tannish at maturity, in range typically seedless, bell-shaped, 20–25 mm long, strongly warty (tuberculate), the tubercles on fruit sides ca. 15, the central ones oblong to 10 mm, areoles with glochids and tannish woolly hairs;

chamber shape cylindric. **Seed:** subspheroid, 6.5–7 mm, yellowish tan, with girdlelike aril, bony; girdle protruding 0.5–1 mm. Early April–early May.

Native. Stem-succulent perennial in range occurring in two small, isolated populations at Wildwood Regional Park, along two hiking trails growing in open scrubland. *Opuntia basilaris* is a desert species, and its presence in Thousand Oaks is unexplained, but the individuals could have been planted there before the park was acquired. Otherwise, in range this is a cactus species that in range appears to lack the ability to reproduce or spread. Beavertail prickly pear has no permanent spines, but instead forms only a cluster of irritating glochids on each areole. Its cladodes are blue-green with a purplish overcast, and they are also grayish due to wax and presence on the surface of minute, erect papillae on every cell. This is the only platyopuntia in California with pink-purple flowers as well as a dry, instead of fleshy, fruit.

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