

# Nopalea auberi

The pictured cactus is probably *Nopalea auberi* (PFEIFFER) SALM-DYCK, but other opinions are certainly welcome! The primary branches of this plant attach to the trunk at right angles, as expected, but this specimen differs from the formal description of *N. auberi* in possessing many spines



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along the trunk. This is a fast growing species; big plants can grow a meter taller each year, while a cutting can grow almost twice that fast, flowering in the second year at roughly one to two meters tall. Detached cladodes (pads) detach and root readily and almost immediately develop a cylindrical trunk. I had one tiny cladode root in the minuscule amount of leaf litter on my roof, and it grew to over a meter tall! My two large specimens, roughly five and ten meters tall respectively, were almost certainly the same clone. They each produced hundreds of flowers per year. The flowers have a typical hummingbird pollination form, and I have seen Ana's hummingbirds feeding from them but have never captured that on film. In Phoenix, Arizona, it flowers February to July, with a peak in April and May. ❖