

# THE PLANT KINGDOM'S GREAT RIDDLE

## 植物王國難以破解之謎

**Riddle:** *What plant is a fruit, vegetable and flower all in one?*  
謎語：什麼植物是水果、蔬菜和花卉的綜合體？

## Answer: *The prickly pear cactus*

### 答案：仙人掌

For centuries, the prickly pear cactus has generated intrigue, allure and curiosity because of its rare status as a fruit, vegetable and flower—all in one. This unique member of the botanical kingdom has served as a staple food on the menus of native people living in the southwestern portion of the United States, throughout Central and South America and even in parts of Europe and the Middle East. Many cultures have also used it for medicinal purposes.

Today the plant is experiencing renewed popularity as both a food and medicine; medical research on the prickly pear cactus includes its use for management and treatment of type II diabetes, management of obesity, investigation of antiviral properties, wound-healing properties, treatment of hyperlipidemias and anti-inflammatory action.

Natural approaches to health, such as prickly pear cactus, are gaining popularity as more people turn to nature for aid. Research and studies increasingly look at natural remedies, confirming their effectiveness in treating and improving many diseases and health challenges. Much of this effectiveness is attributed to the phytonutrients and flavonoids found in herbs and plants, which naturally protect the plant from harmful and deadly bacteria; these same phytonutrients have been found to serve the same function in studies with humans.

幾個世紀以來，仙人掌集水果、蔬菜和花卉為一體的稀有特性，讓人們對其充滿了困惑、迷惘和好奇。這一植物王國的獨特成員，曾經被美國西南部本土居民，美國中南部，甚至部份歐洲和中東本土居民作為主食。還有很多民族的文化中亦把它作為醫藥使用。

今天，這種植物正因其食物和藥物的雙重用途再度流行起來，對仙人掌之藥性進行的研究包括，仙人掌對2型糖尿病的控制和治療作用、對肥胖症的控制力，抗病毒特性的探討、輔助傷口愈合的特性、治療高脂血症和抗炎症的功效。

現在，越來越多的人開始向大自然尋求幫助，所以，利用自然的方法 - 例如使用仙人掌來促進健康，更加受到大眾的歡迎。科學研究人員因此將視角更多地轉向了天然治療方法，去確認這些天然方法在治療多種疾病、改善健康狀況方面的有效性。來自自然的大多效益是由於本草和植物中的植物營養素和類黃酮所產生，而植物營養素類黃酮自然而然地會保護植物免受有害或致死細菌的傷害，並且研究發現，這些植物營養素對人類也會發揮相同的功效。



## The Pad

Another unique aspect of the prickly pear cactus is that each part of the plant can be used. The pad, sometimes called the nopal, contains several naturally occurring vitamins (especially antioxidant vitamins A and C), minerals (potassium, magnesium, calcium and iron), and amino acids, including the eight essential amino acids that are not manufactured by the body.

In Mexico and Central and South America, the prickly pear pad has traditionally been used to control a variety of illnesses, including hyperglycemia. Recent research has confirmed the pads as an effective treatment for type II diabetes. Additional research has shown the flavonoids in the pads can reduce low-density lipids, or “bad” cholesterol.



*Prickly pear pads were likely a favorite treat for Aztec royalty.*

仙人掌掌葉曾是阿茲台克王族最珍愛的食品。

## The Fruit

The fruit, nicknamed the cactus pear, appears near the end of summer on the cactus. It contains pectin and vitamins. The color (ranging from green to red to purple) and size (2 to 4 inches long, 1 to 2 inches in diameter) of the fruit varies, depending on the species of the plant. Low in calories, the fruit is one of the tastiest parts of the cactus and is full of nutrients that strengthen the immune system. It can be eaten raw or prepared in a variety of different ways.

Like the pad, the fruit is high in minerals, antioxidant compounds and flavonoids; daily intake of these important nutrients have been proven to have a significant effect on a person's health and well-being. Research examining the connection between cactus and cholesterol has mainly focused on the cactus fruit, which produces a high-fiber, gelatinous pectin. Although many fruits and vegetables produce pectin, the pectin from the cactus fruit appears to be particularly potent, making it one of the most popular food choices for those looking to lower their cholesterol.

果 - 仙人掌果實，俗稱仙人掌果，大約在夏末的時候會從仙人掌上生長出來。仙人掌果實中含有果膠和維生素。仙人掌果實因品種的不同而顏色各異(有綠色、紅色、紫色等)、大小不等(一般長度2到4吋，直徑1到2吋)，它是仙人掌樹上最美味的部份，其卡路里含量極低，營養含量極高，對強化免疫系統極有助益。仙人掌果實可以生食，也可以各種方法加工食用。

像仙人掌掌葉一樣，仙人掌果實也富含各種礦物質、抗氧化劑複合物和類黃酮物質。經驗證，每日服用這些重要的營養素，會對人體的健康和全面養生產生顯著的作用。在以科學方法檢驗仙人掌和膽固醇之間的關係時，選用的主要是生成粘稠果膠的仙人掌果實，它的粘稠果膠中含有大量纖維。儘管許多水果和蔬菜都可生成果膠，但仙人掌果實中的果膠格外強效，這使它成為那些尋求降膽固醇食品人士所最青睞的食品。

掌 - 仙人掌的另外一個獨特之處，就是它全身的每一個部位都能被利用。仙人掌的掌葉，也被稱作nopal，蘊含著幾種天然維生素(尤其富含抗氧化劑維生素A和C)、礦物質(鉀、鎂、鈣和鐵)，以及氨基酸 - 它包含了人體自身不能產生的八種基本氨基酸。

在墨西哥和中南美洲，仙人掌掌葉在傳統上一直被用來控制高血糖症等多種疾病。最新研究已證實，仙人掌的掌葉治療2型糖尿病十分有效。另外一些研究顯示，仙人掌掌葉中的類黃酮物質，能夠降低低密度脂質，也就是壞的膽固醇。



## The Flower

Like the pad and fruit, the petite cactus flower contains powerful compounds that can make a difference in a person's health. They bloom in the spring and appear as yellow, orange or red rose-like flowers produced from the cactus body.

Cactus flowers are safe to use, with no adverse reactions to internal or external use. The petals are harvested, dried and used in a variety of ways.

花 - 與仙人掌葉和果實一樣，嬌小的仙人掌花也含有強效複合物，可為人體的健康帶來益處。春天的時候，仙人掌花在仙人掌枝幹上綻放，顏色為黃、桔黃、或玫瑰紅等。

仙人掌花無論外用或內服都不會有什麼不良反應，可安全使用。仙人掌花瓣可採收回來，經過乾燥以多種方法使用。



*The cactus family is one of approximately 350 families of flowering plants, and is one of the youngest plant families. The cactus family contains approximately 2,000 different species.*



仙人掌是大約350科開花植物中的一科，並且是最年輕的一個科類。仙人掌科大約有2,000種不同類別的仙人掌。

*Most cactus plants have thorns, but they vary dramatically in terms of their appearance. Some thorns prick at the slightest pressure; others can handle a great deal of pressure before dislodging. No thorns are poisonous! ☛*

大多數的仙人掌植物都長有毛刺，並且這些毛刺看起來可能有著明顯的不同。有些刺因輕微的力量就可以剔除，而另外的一些則需要大力才能去除。但不論是哪種尖刺，都沒有毒！☛

REFERENCES  
Knishinsky, Ran. *Prickly Pear, Cactus Medicine: Treatments for Diabetes, Cholesterol, and the Immune System*. Healing Arts Press, 2004.

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