

# OPUNTIA

26.2

In my head I  
have an index  
of everything  
ever written.

Being a  
quasi-omniscient  
deity takes a  
big head.



TEDDY HARVIA

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#### SOME THOUGHTS ON INDEXES by Dale Speirs

Living as I do on the Information Footpath, those who know me may not be surprised to learn that I keep a subject index to OPUNTIA on 3x5 cards, not in some database file on a computer. Index cards can easily be changed or re-arranged, with the additional protection of not being accidentally erased or lost in the bowels of a hard drive. About the worst that can happen is the deck of cards is dropped on the floor, resulting in fifteen minutes work to put them back in alphabetical order.

I started this index for my own convenience, and reproduce it here for the convenience of OPUNTIA readers. Much useful information is lost for want of a method to find it, and I shall not be one of those at fault for burying it. There is a saying in the SF hobby that "All Knowledge Is Found In Fanzines", but just try and find it.

There have been some bibliographies of fanzines, and no doubt a few indexes. Don Fitch of California is doing up an index of many zines, but of course it would be impossible for one person to track down and index all the multitude of zines published. But many a mickle makes a muckle, and the more information indexed, the better.

I've found that one problem of indexing affecting both the old-fashioned methods and computer databases is the trouble with subject headings. Make them too broad and the details are buried in the mass. Make them too detailed, and one can't see the forest for the trees. It always seems that after one is well along in an index that a better arrangement of headings becomes evident, but too late to work into the index. I suspect that I will get around this as the OPUNTIA index grows by use of more cross-references.

I never use author or title indexes, so you'll not find them here. My observation is that the only ones using an author index are the authors themselves, checking to see if their name is correctly spelt.

Computer indexes that I use at libraries are still in their infancy. Most are either too general, drowning one in details, or too specific, not bringing up more than one or two hits. Information from the precomputer age is usually missing, for who will do the work of going through countless volumes and entering the data? Keyword indexing is too often irrelevant. One gets such returns on a request for "Napoleon" as " ... thin like Napoleon", " ... fat like Napoleon", etcetera. While computer databases are good for a quick start to a search, one will still be slogging volume by volume in the dusty backsets of some elderly periodical.

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**Prickly pear.** The name given to various species of the cactaceous genus *Opuntia*, prickly plants with pear-shaped fleshy edible fruit; also the fruit itself. Formerly also *Prick-pear*, *Prickle-pear*, *Prickled pear*.

1760 J. LEE *Introd. Bot. App.* 322 Prickly Pear, *Cactus*.  
 1764 GRAINGER *Sugar-Cane* 1. 53<sup>o</sup> On this lay cuttings of the prickly pear; They soon a formidable fence will shoot.  
 1825 *Gentl. Mag.* XCV. 1. 318 The Jack-fruit, sweet sops, sour sops, mannees, prickly pears. 1870 DISRAELI *Lothair* lxxvi, Gardens enclo-ed with hedges of prickly pear. 1877 C. GEIKIE *Christ* (1879) 19 He will recognize such fruits as the lime, the banana, the almond, and the prickly pear.

—1877 *—*, L. A. HERAUD *Voy. & Mem. Midshipm.* ix.  
 || **Opuntia** (*opvnsiä*). [*L. Opuntia* (sc. *herbä*), a plant growing, according to Pliny, about the Locrian city Opus (acc. *Opunt-em*) in Greece; taken by Tournefort, 1700, as a generic name.] A large genus of cactaceous plants; also, the fruit of a plant of this genus; the Prickly Pear or Indian Fig.

*Opuntia vulgaris*, the Common Prickly Pear or Barbary Fig. a native of America, is now naturalized on both shores of the Mediterranean, in the Canary Islands, etc.

1601 HOLLAND *Pliny* II. 99 About the city Opus there is an herb called Opuntia, which men delight to eat: this admirable gift the leafe hath, That if it be laied in the ground, it will take root. 1765 in W. Stork *Acc. East Florida* (1766) 79 The third sort of soil produces the cabbage-tree, . . the plumb-tree, and opuntia. 1785 MARTYN *Rousseau's Bot.* xxi. (1794) 287 Opuntias are composed of flat joints connected together. 1878 HOOKER & BALL *Marocco* 277 Enclosed within massive hedges of Opuntia.

Hence **Opuntoid a.**, resembling the Prickly Pears.

1857 BERKELEY *Cryptog. Bot.* 408 Remarkable for the opuntoid constriction of the subfastigate branches.