

Echinocereus Englemannii the Hedgehog Cactus

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Echinocereus, meaning “spiny candle,” was described by Georg Engelmann in 1848. Our local *Echinocereus englemannii* is named after him. Hedgehog cacti are popular in cultivation for their large beautiful flowers, spectacular stems and spines, and often easy culture.

Many form large clumps, but some cluster only sparingly and some are solitary. All flower in the spring to early summer with big, showy, mostly satiny flowers in yellow, green, brown, pink, or purple. *E. triglochidiatus* has heavy, waxy flowers of orange or red. The pistil at an echinocereus flower’s center is usually green. Unique to the genus, emerging flower buds tear through the plant’s skin above an areole, leaving a scar after fading, rather than arising from areoles or axils between areoles as in other cacti. All come from predominately summer-rainfall area, and they tend to be found in fully-exposed, dry microclimates such as vertical rock faces, slopes of scree or arid flats. Root systems are smaller than in some other cacti. These are hints for successful culture: shallow pots, fast-draining mineral soil without organics, full sun, no winter water, and a drying out between waterings in the summer. Periods of most active growth are late winter through late spring, and fall through early winter; many rest during the hottest part of the year, and don’t need much watering.

Echinocereus pectinatus variety *rigidissimus*, the Arizona rainbow cactus, grew throughout the Valley of the Sun and east to Superior before Europeans introduced cattle. Grasslands rather than desert covered central and southern Arizona then, and all the washes were perennial streams. The rainbow needs more summer water than most other species. It lacks the beautiful pink and purple spines when grown in less than full sun or when planted in soils containing much organic material.

Other popular species are:

- *E. dasyacanthus*, with mostly solitary stems and large up-facing flowers
- *E. engelmannii*, a confirmed clumper with long spines and pink flowers
- *E. pentalophus*, a profuse clumper with long narrow stems and huge magenta flowers that looks good as a ground cover or a hanging basket
- *E. pulchella* with its grayish-green solitary body, small spines and huge pink flowers.