

Pereskia grandifolia

Family — *Cactaceae*
Subfamily — *Pereskioideae*
Genus — *Pereskia*

Pereskia, with nine species, is the only genus in the subfamily Pereskioideae, and is the only cactus genus that has persistent non-succulent leaves. It is believed that the ancestor of all cacti resembled *Pereskia*. Species are indigenous to Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay, but not all species and not in all areas of each country. They thrive at 1,300' to 6,900' in elevation. The genus was named after Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, a 16th-century French botanist.

Pereskia species have thin stems and substantial leaves. Many species resemble roses more than cactus, having large, privet-like leaves, spiny stems, and rose-like flowers. Although some are succulents, others are classified as shrubs, trees, and climbing plants.

They are classified as cactus because they have spines which develop from areoles as well as the distinctive floral cup of cacti. The areoles are on the axils of leaves and usually have up to eight spines. Areoles on species with trunks can have up to 120 straight, black spines of varying length (see picture at right). Larger spines are used as needles in some countries.

Common names – Leaf cactus, lemon vine, rose cactus

Roots – Can be thickened and tuberous.

Leaves – Usually alternate, broad, flattened, deciduous, and with petioles.

Flowers – Mostly solitary but sometimes inflorescences of 2–15 flowers, with *P. aciculata* having up to 70 flowers on its inflorescences. Flowers are $\frac{3}{4}$ "–3" in diameter, and colors most often are pink, rose, or purple, but also can be orange, yellow, white, or cream.

Fruit – Some species have edible fruit up to about 4" long (but usually $\frac{3}{4}$ "–2 $\frac{3}{4}$ "), solitary or in clusters. The fruit is variable in shape but usually oblong or pear-shaped. Mature fruits most often are green or greenish yellow but can also be orange, red, or brown.

Seeds – 2–7 mm large, glossy black, and obovate to kidney shaped.

Credits

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2. Tree spines – Wikipedia; attribution not required
3. *Pereskia grandifolia* on display here is from the author's collection.

