



Invasive cacti

a prickly problem

Invasive cacti are a serious threat to biodiversity and agricultural systems within Australian rangeland regions. The key features listed may assist you to identify these prickly invaders.

Opuntia

Opuntia aurantiaca Tiger pear



- Low spreading shrub to 0.3m tall. Branches prostrate to somewhat erect.
- Dark green to dark purple. Flattened, sometimes rounded, 6-15cm long. Easily detached. No tubercles.
 - Yellow to orange-yellow.
 - Fleshy, globular shaped, to 3cm long. Red-purple. Sterile.
 - Usually 2-3 spines, 1-3cm long. Brown-yellowish.

Opuntia elata Riverina pear



- Shrubby plant with erect branches to 2m tall.
- Glossy green, sometimes with a purple tinge (especially around areoles and margins). Often more than 2cm thick, 5-25cm long.
 - Orange.
 - Club shaped, to 6cm long. Purplish red.
 - Spines absent, or 1-3 short spines present at some areoles. Whitish yellow.

Opuntia elatior



- Shrubby, forming dense, much branched clumps 5m tall.
- Olive green. Oblong shaped, 10-40cm long.
 - Yellow-orange, with red stripes.
 - Egg shaped. Reddish when ripe.
 - 2-8 spines, 2-4cm long. Needle like. Dark brown.

Opuntia engelmannii



- Low shrub to 1.5m tall. Forms dense clumps. Can be confused with *O. robusta*, but has a low, creeping habit.
- Green to blue-green. Flattened, round to egg shaped, 15-20cm long.
 - Yellow.
 - Fleshy, to 7cm long. Purple. Almost spineless.
 - 1-6 spines, 1-4cm long. Yellowish.

*Opuntia ficus-indica** Indian fig



- Large shrub/tall tree to 5m tall. Usually with a trunk.
- Dull blue-green. Flattened, egg to oblong shape, 20-60cm long.
 - Yellow.
 - To 10cm long. Yellow, orange, red, purple.
 - Mostly spineless cultivars in Australia.
- *Note *O. ficus-indica* is not a Weed of National Significance and is not a declared weed in all States and Territories.

Opuntia microdasys Bunny ears or Golden bristle cactus



- Branched shrub, forming thickets to 1m tall.
- Green to pale green and velvety. Round to oblong shaped, 6-15cm long. Distinctive clusters of yellow glochids.
 - Yellow.
 - Fleshy, globular shaped, to 3cm long. Red-purple. Sterile.
 - Spines usually absent, rarely one.

Opuntia monacantha Drooping tree pear



- Erect shrub to 2m tall, sometimes with a short trunk. Plant has an obvious drooping appearance.
- Glossy green. Oblong to egg shaped, thin profile, 10-30cm long.
 - Yellow or orange-yellow.
 - Pear shaped, to 7cm long. Red. Spineless.
 - 1-2 spines, 2-4cm long. Brown to off-white.

Opuntia robusta Wheel cactus



- Shrubby /tree-like to 2m tall. Many branches.
- Blue green. Circular shape, thick profile, to 40cm wide.
 - Yellow.
 - Fleshy, globular shaped, to 8cm long. Deep red. Numerous fertile seeds.
 - 2-12 spines, up to 5cm long. White to pale brown or yellow.

Opuntia stricta Common prickly pear



- Sprawling/ erect shrub, up to 2m tall. Forms thickets.
- Blue-green. Egg or oblong shaped, 10-25cm long.
 - Yellow.
 - Fleshy, globular to pear shaped, to 6cm long. Purplish red. Numerous fertile seeds.
 - Spines often absent. In the *O. stricta* var. *dillenii* form can be up to 11 spines, 1.5-4cm long. Yellow, or with brown bands.

Opuntia tomentosa



- Shrubby to treelike, up to 5m tall. Often with a trunk. Segments and fruits covered in fine hairs, giving a velvety appearance.
- Oblong to egg shaped, 15-30cm long.
 - Orange.
 - Globular to egg shaped, to 5cm long. Red.
 - Often spineless, but can have 0-4 spines, 0.5-1.5cm long. Whitish-yellow.

Key to symbols

- Stem segments
- Flowers
- Fruits
- Spines

Glossary

- Areole – small pits or depressions on the surface of segments.
- Glochids – small, detachable barbed bristles.
- Tubercle – a small raised area or nodule on a plant surface.
- Stem segment – distinct, individual part of the stem. Can be cylindrical (e.g. in *Austrocylindropuntia* & *Cylindropuntia*), or flattened (e.g. in *Opuntia*, commonly referred to as pads).
- Sheath – papery outer covering of the spine. Only present in *Cylindropuntia* species.

This poster is based on a previous version by the South Australian Opuntia Taskforce.



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