Opuntia cacti *(Opuntia spp.)*

Fact sheet

What do they look like?

Opuntia cacti, also known as prickly pear, are succulent, shrubby perennials with green, oval-shaped pads dotted with spines, which are light or dark green depending on the health of the plant, with the base of plants consisting of single or multiple stems. Plants can grow from 1–2m tall and have variously coloured flowers that ultimately turn into red-fleshy fruits. These flowers and fruits grow on top of the pads that make up the plant.

Why should Opuntia cacti be controlled?

Opuntia cacti plants should be controlled as they can spread very easily. The ripe fruit is an attractive meal to birds and foxes, which, after consuming the animal then deposits the seeds through their faeces. New plants can easily grow from pads that have been knocked off existing plants; so this species can spread very quickly into surrounding areas including pastoral regions, rangelands and native vegetation.

Plants that are growing in front yards or overhanging fences also have the opportunity to be extremely invasive. Parts of the plant may be knocked into back lanes or storm water drains and transported to new locations.

Opuntia cacti are weeds of national significance (WoNS). They hinder movement through landscapes and can injure animals with their large spines.

What are my responsibilities?

All Opuntia cacti excluding spineless *Opuntia ficus-indica* and *Tephrocactus* spp. (prickly pear) are declared under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. This means it is illegal to transport or sell these plants and all property owners have a responsibility to control Opuntia cacti on their property. Residents who rent their properties also have obligations to control declared species. This also includes anyone who is leasing property unless other arrangements have been made.

What are the best ways to control Opuntia cacti?

Chemical methods are the only effective method of controlling Opuntia cacti, as they can re-grow from any section of the plant. Chemical control is relatively easy and is best undertaken when the plant is actively growing i.e. when the pads are dark green colour and the plant is flowering or beginning to fruit.

Chemical control

Stem injection is one method of control. A deep-grooved drill bit should be used to make a 45 degree hole in the stem of the plant, right into the core. Undiluted glyphosate (450g/L) should then be put deep into the stem of the plant. You can use equipment such as a garden spray bottle with the nozzle turned to the squirt setting or a syringe. Injecting 2-4ml of glyphosate undiluted into every fourth pad on a plant is recommended as well.

Basal bark using triclopyr (600g/L) at an application rate of 800ml/60L biodiesel or diesel. Use only on plants up to 10cm basal diameter, also cover all pads with spray.

Biological control

Cactus moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) and some species of the cochineal mealy bug (*Dactylopius sp*) have been introduced on the Eyre Peninsula. This utilises natural control agents to decrease the density and abundance of the cacti population. It is suited to large or remote locations and can be easily spread. Biocontrols are only active in the warm months and are dormant over winter.

Cochineal biocontrols are specific to Opuntia species and ineffective unless the correct biotype is used. Even if the biocontrol and

biotype for two different Opuntia species are the same, infected pads from different Opuntia species should never be moved between sites - otherwise there is a risk of starting a new infestation of a different cactus species. Biocontrols should only be used under the direction of landscape officers. It is prohibited under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019* to transport declared weeds without a permit.

Do you have Opuntia cacti?

If you think you have Opuntia cacti on your property, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board staff can provide advice on control and management.

More information

Email: ep.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au
Phone: 08 8688 3200

www.landscape.sa.gov.au/ep