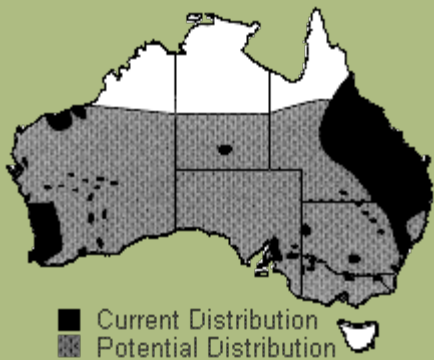


# Weed Identification

Australia > > Prickly Pear (common)

Prickly Pear (common)

*Opuntia stricta*



[Pictorial glossary of plant part terms used in this guide.](#)

**THIS PLANT HAS BEEN DECLARED A WEED OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Alternative Name(s): Erect Prickly Pear.

Family: Cactaceae.

Form: Shrub

Origin: Native to the Caribbean region.

Flowers/Seedhead: Flowers: yellow, mostly on the margins of the fleshy segments. Flowers late spring to summer.

Description: An erect shrub to 1 m (rarely to 2 m) high. True leaves are shed early and stem segments are often incorrectly referred to as leaves. Lower segments may be thickened and trunk-forming on older plants while flattened upper segments are up to 40 cm long and up to 25 cm wide. Fruit are egg-shaped with a depressed top, purple when ripe and edible. Seeds pale brown, to 5 mm long.

Distinguishing features: Distinguished by showy yellow flowers about 6 cm wide; presence of small bristles (glochids) in clusters in depressions (areoles) on segments and fruit, these glochids readily attach to skin and are difficult to remove; areoles on segments may also have 1 or no spines to 6 cm long.

Dispersal: Spread by seed or vegetatively by segments that root where they contact the ground.

Confused With: Other *Opuntia* species but none of the naturalised ones look like the pictures shown here.



Yellow flowers are borne on succulent segments, Tamworth, NSW, Nov  
photo J.R. Hosking

Notes: Common Prickly Pear was the major weed problem in large areas of northern NSW and central Queensland in the early 1900s. This cactus is now found over a larger area but is rarely a problem. During the 1920s and 1930s various biological control agents were released for its control. Two of these, *Cactoblastis* *Cactoblastis cactorum* (see photo) and a

cochineal, *Dactylopius opuntiae*, control this cactus in most areas.

References:

*Noxious Weeds of Australia*. W. Parsons and E. Cuthbertson, 1992, pages 364–366. *Plant Protection Quarterly*. J. Hosking et al., 1988, Vol. 3, pages 115–123.

Web References: [Search Australian web sites for further information on this weed.](#)



Larvae of *Cactoblastis cactorum*



Fruit forms at base of the flower

This weed has been included in the WEEDeck field guide as card S12. More information about WEEDeck is available from [Sainty & Associates Pty. Ltd.](#)

It has also been included in the '[Jumping the Garden Fence](#)' report (*WWF-Australia PDF - 1.19mb*) which examines the impact of invasive garden plants on Australian agricultural land and natural ecosystems.

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