

Weed Sheet

Declared weed sheet : Prickly Pest Pears



Government of South Australia
South Australian Murray-Darling Basin
Natural Resources Management Board

Prickly Pest Pears

(various *Opuntia* species but excluding spineless Indian fig, *Opuntia ficus-indica*)

Prickly pest pears are shallow rooted drought tolerant plants which can impede movement of stock and humans, displace native plants and reduce the carrying capacity of pasture. Infestations can easily expand and spread when segments break off and come in contact with soil or when the fruit is consumed and spread by birds and foxes.



Devils Rope, (*Cylindropuntia imbricata*)



Wheel Cactus, (*Opuntia robusta*)



Tiger Pear, (*Opuntia aurantiaca*)



Common or Erect Prickly Pear, (*Opuntia stricta*)

Prickly Pest Pears

What are they?

Prickly pest pears are perennial drought tolerant shallow rooted shrubs up to 4m high. They are able to propagate by seed or vegetatively from segments coming in contact with the ground.

What does it look like?

Common or Erect Prickly Pear, (*Opuntia stricta*)

Growth habit: Erect shrub to 2m.

Stems: Dull green or bluish green segments. Base segments typically form trunks while upper segments form elliptic or obovate 'pads' up to 300mm long 150-200mm wide, and 10-20mm thick.

Leaves: Small conical leaves, 4-6mm long are produced below the areoles (eyes) on young segments and are shed as the segment matures. Can be present with or without spines.

Flowers: Lemon yellow flowers 60-80mm in diameter, with a fleshy base appear on margins of segments.

Fruit: Pear shaped fruit 40-60mm long with reddish purple skin and reddish flesh with a deep cavity in one end.

Root: Shallow fibrous root system.

Tiger Pear, (*Opuntia aurantiaca*)

Growth habit: Low shrub up to 600mm.

Stems: Stems consists of a series of dark green to purple segments each up to 300mm long and to 50mm in diameter. Each areole (eye) has 3-7 spines up to 40mm long.

Leaves: as for *Opuntia stricta*.

Flower: Yellow about 60mm in diameter.

Fruit: Fruit are rarely formed, pear shaped, red and about 25mm long, seed is sterile.

Root: Underground tubers with short fibrous roots.

Wheel Cactus, (*Opuntia robusta*)

Growth habit: Erect shrub to 4m.

Stems: Blue-green fleshy circular flat 'pads' up to 400mm in diameter with 1-5 spines 40mm long protruding from the areole (eye).

Leaves: As for *Opuntia stricta*.

Flower: Yellow flowers 50-80mm in diameter but do not develop until plants are at least 3 years old.

Fruit: Pink to purple in colour, barrel shaped up to 80mm long and 60mm in diameter, with dark red flesh.

Root: As for *Opuntia stricta*.

Devils Rope, (*Cylindropuntia imbricata*)

Growth habit: Open branching shrub growing to 3m.

Stems: Hairless, cylindrical dull green segments up to 400mm in length and up to 50mm thick, The segments have short raised ridges that give the appearance of twined rope. Areoles are found along these ridges and have 3-11 pale yellow spines about 25mm in length protruding from them.

Leaves: As for *Opuntia stricta*.

Flower: Dull red purple in colour and found at the ends of segments.

Fruit: Yellow fruit, resembling a small custard apple.

Root: As for *Opuntia stricta*.

Why are they a problem?

Prickly pest pears are drought tolerant plants, which can impede movement and displace native vegetation and pasture species.

Some of the *Opuntia* species were used as fodder crops, but the spines on many species deterred many grazing animals.

Fruits are a food source for birds (both native and introduced) and foxes, and are also a biosecurity threat to horticultural industries as they are a host for fruit fly.

Affected land uses include rangelands grazing, non-arable grazing, horticulture and urban land uses.

Where are they found?

Prickly pest pears originated from Northern and Central America and were originally introduced into Australia as early as 1839 for ornamental shrubs, hedge plants, fodder plants for stock and as a food plant for cochineal insects to support the carmine dye industry.

Prickly pest pears soon became established and spread quickly especially in Queensland, where by 1926 they covered 24 million hectares. The introduction of biological control agents, particularly *Cactoblastis cactorum* in 1925 to 1932, removed up to 90% of the Queensland prickly pest pear infestation.

Prickly pest pears can be found across the whole South Australian Murray-Darling Basin region, while the more concerning species like *Opuntia robusta*, *Opuntia aurantiaca*, and *Cylindropuntia imbricata* are predominately found in isolated infestations in the Riverland and the northern Rangelands areas.

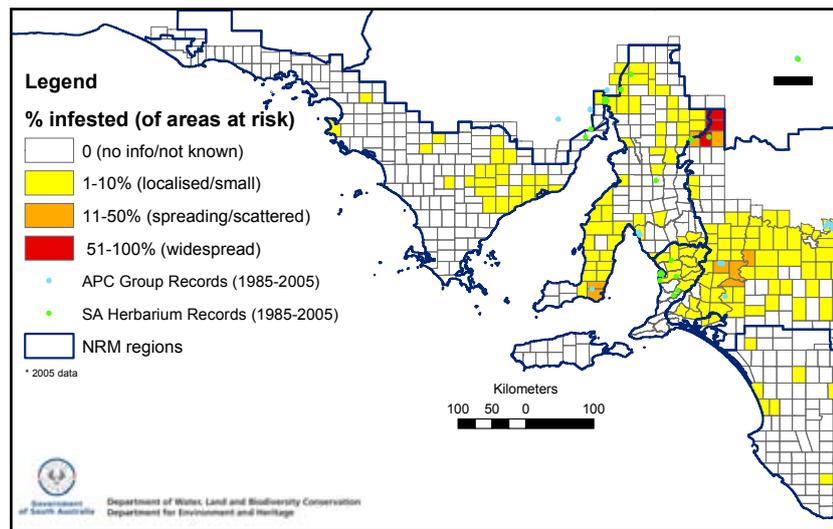
How are they spread?

The fruits and seed of many of the *Opuntia* species (except Tiger Pear, *Opuntia aurantiaca*) are eaten and spread by birds and foxes.

All *Opuntia* species are actively growing throughout the year and can form roots and shoots from the areole on a segment when it comes into contact with the ground. Segments may be knocked off the parent plant by animals, wind or water and are capable of surviving periods of drought.

How do we control them?

Physical control: Physical removal and deep burial and/or burning is only suitable for small infestations, care should be taken to bury/burn all segments and growth material.



Infestation Level of PRICKLY PEST PEAR (*Opuntia spp.*) by hundreds in the State of South Australia*

Chemical control: The application, either by foliar spray, or injection into the main stem or individual segments with products containing Glyphosate, MSMA, Triclopyr, Triclopyr+Picloram mixes and Metsulfuron methyl. Some of these products are soil active and residual, care should be taken when applying, always read and follow the label directions.

Monitoring and re-treatment (if required) is essential to controlling these pest plants.



Cactoblastis moth



Cochineal insects

Biological control: Biological control agents such as the Cactoblastis moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) and Cochineal insects (*Dactylopius* species) have varied rates of success and are dependent on the *Opuntia* species being controlled.

For more advice on recognising and controlling *Opuntia* species, contact the Natural Resources Management Board Officer.

Reference :

Parsons, W.T and Cuthbertson, E.G (2001) Noxious Weeds of Australia 2nd Edition, CSIRO Publishing.

Contact us



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Legislation

Prickly pest pears, (*Opuntia* species excluding Indian Fig, *Opuntia ficus-indica*) are declared under the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Act 2004.

Declared Plant Class 1C(ii)
Declared Plant Category 1

The following provisions of the NRM Act 2004 are to be applied to the whole of the State:

175(1)(2) - relates to the movement of plants into a control area or on public roads.

177(1)(2) - relates to the sale of plants, or produce or goods carrying plants.

182(2)(3) - relates to the obligation of an owner of land to control and keep controlled the plant and take any measures prescribed by the relevant authority.

185(1) - relates to the ability of the NRM authority to recover costs of control on roadsides from adjoining landholders.



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An Australian Government Initiative

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