

Prickly pears (*Opuntia* spp.)

Weed management guide

Weed type
Cactus

February 2022

www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/central-west



In NSW, weeds are regulated by the NSW Biosecurity Act, 2015. All land managers have a General Biosecurity Duty to contain the spread of weeds

“General Biosecurity Duty means that any person dealing with plant matter must take measures to prevent, minimize or eliminate the biosecurity risk (as far as is reasonably practicable).”

The Regional priority for Prickly pears is Asset Protection. In order to achieve this, Land Managers are asked to: *Mitigate the risk of new weeds being introduced to their land and reduce impacts on priority assets. The plant should not be bought, sold, grown, carried or released into the environment.*

For further information, contact your local Biosecurity (Weeds) Officer via Central West Local Land Services or visit NSW WeedWise.

NSW WeedWise



Habit and description

Prickly pears refer to cacti belonging to the genus *Opuntia*. These can take the form of either a shrub or a small tree. Its succulent stems (pads) vary in shape (flattened, cylindrical, club-shaped or compressed). These are dotted with spots (areoles) that sport hair-like bristles (glochids) and spines. Most species are monoecious (with male and female flowers) that also vary in colour (from yellow to purple). Fruits attached to the pads can be solitary or sometimes form chains. The insides can be dry or juicy, and its skin covered with glochids. Multiple seeds can be found in each fruit, varying in shape (round, irregular, kidney-shaped).

These cacti are found over a wide variety of habitats but is naturalized in sub-humid, semi-arid and arid areas.



Photo: © John Jen Schabel | NSW DPI



Photo: © Queensland DAF | NSW DPI



Photo: © Paul Sullivan | NSW DPI



Photo: © Bob Chinnock | NSW DPI

Reproduction and spread

Some Prickly pears do not produce seeds in Australia and rely on detached plant parts to spread. However, some species, such as Common pear (*O. stricta*) can produce seeds with long viability. These are spread by birds and other animals.

Impacts

Agriculture



- Infestations create a physical barrier which makes it difficult for livestock to move to pastures or watering holes.
- It can cause injury to livestock due to its spines.
- These cacti also lower productivity in cultivated land.

Native vegetation



- Prickly pear is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) in Australia (NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2017)
- When Prickly pears occur in dense infestations, these can affect the growth and regeneration of other native plants, especially shrubs and other short plants.

Management

Chemical



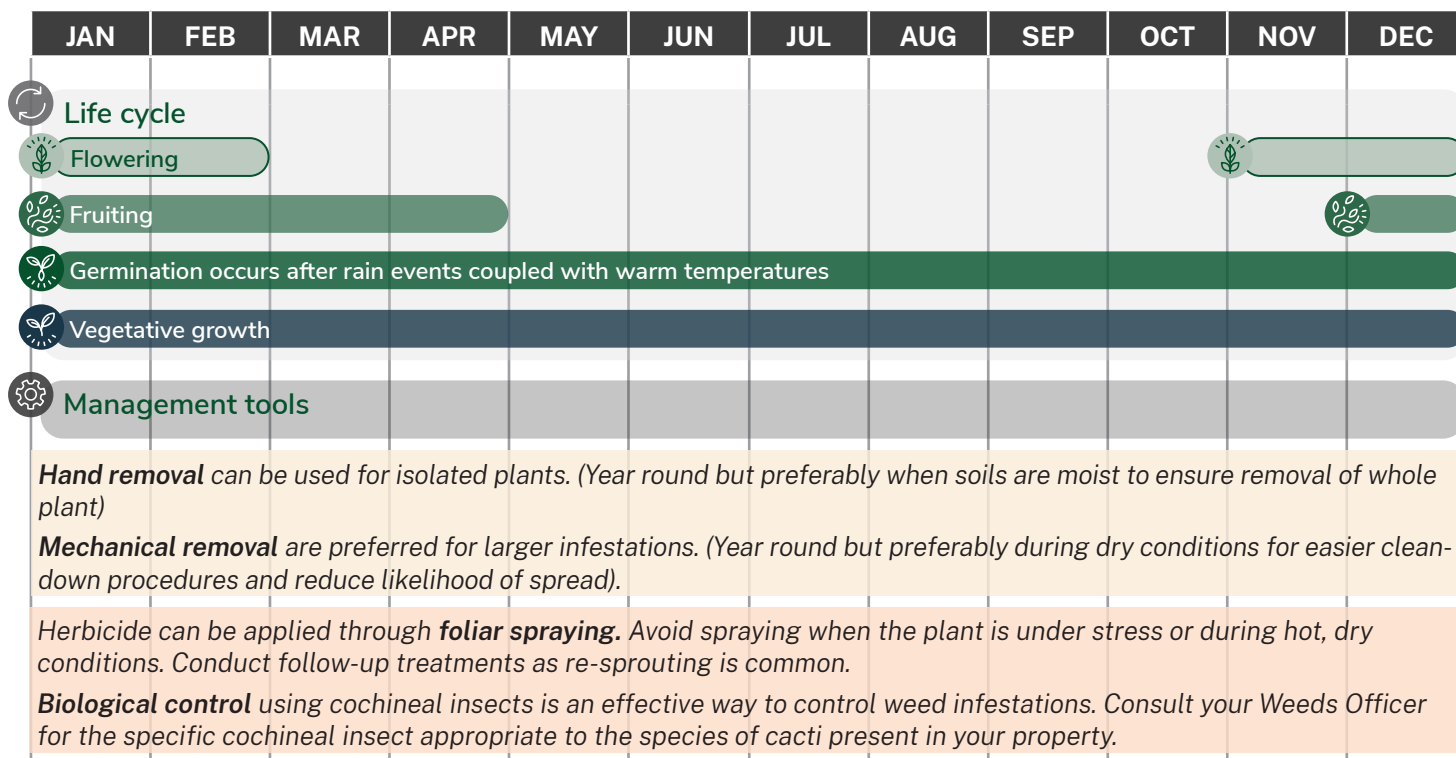
- Spraying is the preferred method of applying herbicide. As the plant may regrow, follow-up treatments maybe required.
- Spray when the plants are actively growing. Avoid spraying when the plant is under stress or during hot, dry conditions.
- Seek the guidance of an experienced Weeds Officer for expert advice on herbicide use.
- Visit www.apvma.gov.au for a list of registered products, product labels and permit requirements.
- NSW DPI (2018) provides a list of recommended herbicides for the control of Prickly pears at <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/PricklyPearsOpuntias>

Non-chemical



- Physical removal is effective for small and scattered infestations. Ensure that the whole plant is removed to prevent regrowth.
- Mechanical removal is recommended against dense infestation and also opens up access for follow-up treatments.
- Cochineal insects are an effective long-term control against Prickly pears. Certain insects target only certain cacti. Thus, identifying the correct species of the cacti is key to determining what kind of insect to use. Contact the local weed officer for advice.

Management calendar



Optimal control options may vary depending on your location and climate. Consult an experienced Weeds Officer based in your local government area for control methods suited to your conditions.

All herbicides must be used in accordance with the herbicide label and permit requirements.

Further information

For more information on your general biosecurity duties, visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity.

For the best guidance on how to meet this duty on your property, contact your expert Weeds Officer at your local council or via Local Land Services www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/central-west.

NSW WeedWise



References

NSW Department of Primary Industries. (2017). Weeds of National Significance. Retrieved from NSW WeedWise: <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/WeedListPublics/CategoryResults?showImages=True&categoryId=1&pageTitle=Weeds%20of%20National%20Significance>

NSW DPI. (2018). NSW WeedWise. <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/PricklyPearsOpuntias>

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