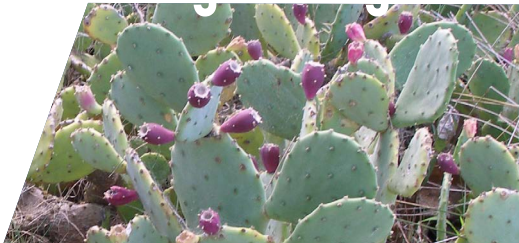
Hunter Region Priority Weed

Opuntia species

Prickly pears thrive in drought

Management guide

HUNTER REGIONAL weeds



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, minimise or eliminate the biosecurity risk (as far as is reasonably practicable)."

The Regional priority for Opuntia species is to protect assets from the weed's impacts. In order to achieve this

Land Managers are asked to:

Maintain the State-wide Prohibition on dealings, where the plant must not be imported into the State or sold.

For further information contact your local Biosecurity (Weeds) Officer via Hunter Regional Weeds or visit NSW WeedWise

Impacts

- First introduced into Australia with the first fleet to establish a cochineal dye industry, Opuntias are cactuses and are extremely hardy, thriving in dry and growing well in drought.
- By 1920 Opuntia stricta (Common prickly pear) had infested 23,000,000 hectares in NSW and Queensland.
- Half of the infested area was so densely covered it was useless for production and was abandoned by its owners.
- Spread by segments which break from plants easily and are transported by water, stock and to a lesser extent by tyres.
- Some species also spread by seed, via birds and foxes eating fruit.
- Prickly pears impede stock movement.
- Spines can be harmful to stock.
- Displaces native vegetation.
- Reduces carrying capacity.
- Opuntia weed species as a group includes Common prickly pear, Smooth tree pear, Tiger pear and Velvety tree pear.
- Tiger pear is now regarded now as the most troublesome of all cactus species in NSW.
- Opuntia species are Weeds of National Significance*

**These weeds are regarded as the worst weeds in Australia because of their invasiveness, potential for spread, and economic and environmental impacts.*

Management

- Manual or mechanical removal can be effective. Take care not to spread further by dropping segments.
- Care must be taken with chemical control not to kill off established biocontrol agents. Methods include stem pad injection and foliar spraying.
- Cochineal insects are now a control method, despite being the reason behind the introduction of *Opuntias* in the first place.
- Cactoblastis moths were an early success in the release of biological control agents.
- **Common prickly pear** is largely controlled by cactoblastis, *Cactoblastis cactorum*. It can also be controlled by the cochineal, *Dactylopius opuntiae*.
- **Smooth tree pear's** biocontrol agent, a cochineal (*Dactylopius ceylonicus*) is established and has significant impact on smooth tree pear, particularly if plants are also felled.
- **Tiger pear** infestations are controlled biologically using cochineal, *Dactylopius austrinus*. Small isolated infestations can be controlled chemically.
- **Velvety tree pear** can be controlled biologically using cochineal, *Dactylopius tomentosus*. Felling of large plants once cochineal is established often results in more rapid control compared with unfelled plants. The cactoblastis moth causes significant damage to small plants and seedlings.

Bio control Identification

Cactoblastis caterpillar on Common prickly pear. *Photo: K Hignell*

Cactoblastis damage on Common prickly pear. The plant gradually collapses. *Photo: P Sykes*

Cochineal insects on Tiger pear. *Photo: J Hosking*

Identification

Common prickly pear (*Opuntia stricta*) bearing fruit. *Photo: K Hignell*

Common prickly pear flowers. *Photo: Jen Schabel*

Velvety tree pear (*Opuntia tomentosa*) has a distinctive velvety covering on segments and orange flowers. *Photo: Jen Schabel*

Tiger pear (*Opuntia aurantiaca*) can hide in long grass and be difficult to see. *Photo: M Edmonds*

Smooth tree pear flowers and fruit. *Photo: Paul Marynissen Central Coast Council*

Smooth tree pear (*Opuntia monacantha*), also known as drooping prickly pear. Smooth tree pear has an obvious drooping habit. Flowers are yellow to orange-yellow. *Photo: B Shepherd*

Management Calendar

The calendar below outlines the management approach for a typical year.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Growth stage	Growth stage is extremely variable depending on climatic conditions and species. Varying species can show all stages of growth throughout the year.											
Action	Manual removal possible at all times of the year.											
	Herbicide control timing depends on active growth, climatic conditions, and chemical and method chosen.											
	Biocontrol agents available for release – timing depends on climatic conditions and species. See your local Biosecurity (Weeds) Officer for further information.											

Recommended control options may vary according to your area. There are experienced professional Biosecurity (Weeds) Officers based in each Local Government Area who have local knowledge and can provide expert advice for your weed management situation. Contact your expert Biosecurity (Weeds) Officer at your local Council or at **Hunter Regional Weeds.**

Herbicide control options for all areas in NSW, including current herbicide registrations, are available for Opuntias at **NSW WeedWise.**

Remember that all herbicide must be used and handled in accordance with the label or permit.

https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/Opuntia

Get the WeedWise app

Further information

For further information on how to meet your General Biosecurity Duty on your property, your best source is the expert Weeds Officer at your local Council or via Hunter Regional Weeds.

Contact Hunter Regional Weeds
www.hunterregionalweeds.net.au

Hunter Local Land Services
www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/hunter

NSW Weed Wise
www.weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au