

Wheel cactus

Prohibited invasive plant

Look. Report. Protect. 13 25 23



- It is illegal to keep, cultivate, transport or sell wheel cactus in Queensland.
- Upright shrub with multiple stems growing up to 4 m high.
- Pad segments are flat, circular, bluish-green up to 40 cm wide.
- Flowers are yellow, 5–8 cm wide. Fruit are fleshy, green and rounded up to 8 cm long.
- Early detection and reporting helps protect Queensland's natural environment.

Description

Native to northern and central Mexico, wheel cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) is a branched upright shrub growing 1–2 m high, sometimes up to 4 m high. Flowers are yellow, 5–8 cm wide and are borne singly along the upper margins of the stem segments. Flowering occurs mostly in late spring and summer. The pads are large, 20–25 cm wide, sometimes up to 40 cm, heavy and strongly attached to each other. Each pad can have up to 12 white to pale brown or yellow sharp spines up to 5 cm long. It produces numerous, single fruit around the pads. The green fleshy fruit are up to 8 cm long, 6 cm wide and turn pink–purple as they mature. Seeds are round and mostly light or dark brown. It reproduces by stem fragments and also by seeds. Stem fragments are spread by becoming attached to animals, footwear and vehicles and are also dispersed in dumped garden waste. The fruit are eaten by various animals including birds and foxes and spread in their droppings. Wheel cactus prefers arid and semi-arid areas, and sometimes also warmer temperate regions. It can invade pastures, rocky outcrops, open woodlands and ranges. It has been recently detected in Brisbane. Wheel cactus is similar in appearance to Westwood pear (*Opuntia streptacantha*). The greyish-green pads are similar in shape and size.

Biosecurity risk

Wheel cactus is a prohibited invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. In Queensland it is illegal to sell wheel cactus on Gumtree, Ebay, Facebook, at markets, nurseries or any marketplace. Prohibited species must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Wheel cactus can impact on ecosystems, waterways and agriculture. The spines are sharp, can penetrate human skin causing severe irritation and are difficult to remove. It is very adaptable and is able to survive in a wide range of habitats. It has become a major pest in South Australia and can also be found in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. Early detection of potentially invasive pests is essential. Once a pest has spread over a large area, eradication is generally no longer feasible. If permitted to spread, wheel cactus could invade vast areas, much like the prickly pear cactus did.

What should I do?

If you think you have seen wheel cactus, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or scan the QR code to access our reporting web page. Until an authorised officer contacts you, please take reasonable and practical steps to prevent wheel cactus from spreading.

More information

Contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

