

Blind cactus

Prohibited invasive plant

Look. Report. Protect. 13 25 23



Blind cactus (*Opuntia rufida*) is a cactus native to northern Mexico. It has been found in Queensland growing in gardens as ornamentals. This species is currently targeted for eradication.

In high risk areas, Biosecurity Queensland and local governments have been assisting landholders with the removal of blind cactus to stop its spread.

The glochids of blind cactus may blind cattle and if humans come into contact with the glochids, it can have some health impacts.

If allowed to spread, blind cactus has the potential to spread over considerable areas of Queensland.

A closely related species, prickly pear (*Opuntia stricta*), invaded 24 million ha (60 million acres) in Queensland and New South Wales by 1924, in many cases making land worthless.

Possession, propagation and distribution of blind cactus as an ornamental plant are not considered reasonable and practical measures to prevent or minimize the biosecurity risks posed by blind cactus.



Queensland
Government

In Queensland it is illegal to sell blind cactus on Gumtree, eBay, Facebook, at markets, nurseries or any marketplace.

Legal requirements

Blind cactus is a prohibited invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. The Act requires that all sightings of blind cactus must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours of the sighting.

By law, everyone has a general biosecurity obligation (GBO) to take all reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risk of spread of blind cactus until they receive advice from an authorised officer. It must not be kept, moved, given away, sold, or released into the environment.

Description

Blind cactus forms a dense shrub 40–60 cm tall, occasionally more, composed of pad-like stems 6–15 cm long and 4–12 cm broad. There is no central stem and pads always grow in pairs giving the appearance of bunny ears.

It has no spines, but instead has numerous red-brown glochids (hair-like prickles), 2–3 mm long in dense clusters; these detach very easily on being touched, and can cause considerable skin irritation, so the plants must be treated with caution.

Flowers are yellow 3 cm wide. Fruits are fleshy globular shape to 3 cm long and red-purple in colour.

Opuntia rufida is a closely related to *Opuntia microdasys* with red glochids instead of white or yellow (golden) glochids. For practical purposes, this cactus would be considered the same as *Opuntia microdasys*.

Life cycle

Vegetative spread is the most common form of dispersal. This can occur all year round when segments break off and fall to the ground and start growing. Being drought resistant they survive where other plants can't and are easily transported by animals, people, water and vehicles.

Methods of spread

The main method of spread is from broken segments through people unknowingly giving potted plants away, and being transported on animals, people, vehicles and water.

Habitat and distribution

Blind cactus prefers open habitats within arid and semi-arid rangeland. It is not established in Queensland, but has been detected in gardens across Queensland being grown as an ornamental. It is likely to exist in gardens and rockeries elsewhere. It has the potential to become abundant and widespread.

Control

All suspected sightings of blind cactus must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland, which will work with the relevant person to control the plant. Anyone finding suspected plants should immediately take steps to minimise the biosecurity risk of blind cactus spreading.

More information

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



Opuntia rufida with red-brown glochids



Opuntia microdasys – similar cactus with white or yellow (golden) glochids



Opuntia rufida flower



Fact sheets are available from biosecurity.qld.gov.au. The control methods recommended should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation, and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the use of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, the department does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.