Blind cactus 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 hectares (60 million acres) in Queensland and New South Wales by 1924, in many cases making land worthless.

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

Blind cactus (*Opuntia rufida*) 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 steps to minimise the 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 without a permit.

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 risk of blind cactus spreading.

Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

Opuntia rufida with red-brown glochids

Opuntia rufida with red-brown glochids

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

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