

Identifying and Controlling Cacti

Known as the plants that thrive on neglect, cacti are drought resistant and hardy, having the ability to survive on minimal rainfall. They inflict negative impacts on Australian environments, agriculture and finance as they compete with native vegetation, thus limiting the growth of perennial groundcover species. They also pose a threat to animal and human welfare with their sharp spines and poisonous properties. Due to their capacity to spread fast and readily by seeds and stem fragments, it is important that identified cacti species undergo control actions before distribution levels and the negative effects of these plants become harder to reverse. However, before adopting strategies for effective control of cacti, it must first be determined if cacti is situated on your land.

Numerous characteristics are recognized as unique to cacti which can help determine a cactus from other succulents. These features include:

- **Areoles:** these are distinctive to cacti and are described as a slightly raised cushion part distributed along the stem.
- **Spines, needles or short hairs:** in the absence of leaves, most cacti have spines, needles or short hairs which protrude from the areoles to protect the plants moist interior from grazing animals and humans.
- **Flowers:** all cacti have flowers – if a succulent does not produce a flower, it is not a cactus. However, it is important to note that cacti flowers are short-lived and do not display in all stages of plant maturity.

To aid in further identification of the cacti and to determine the species, ensure you have good photos of your cactus. It is generally easier for the plant to be identified by others if the picture is taken while it is in bloom, and includes any flowers present.

After identifying that cacti reside on your property, you might want to consider which control actions are necessary to address your problem. For general treatment of weeds a six-step weed control plan can be used and adapted to your circumstances.

STEP ONE: DEFINE AND PRIORITISE THE PROBLEM AREAS

- The easiest way to define problem areas is to use a map of the property and mark infestation areas noting size and density.
- Prioritise the areas for control at a property level and then at a paddock-to-paddock level.
- Consider what legal or ethical responsibilities you might have, and any relevant local Government, catchments or regional priorities.

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STEP TWO: DETERMINE THE CONTROL OPTIONS

- Identify the resources that are already available or affordable, such as spray equipment, machinery and labour.
- Determine the control methods required to address all phases of the control program – initial, follow up and on-going.
- Identify the most appropriate way to deal with the infestations in each situation.
- To help prevent infestations from spreading, efforts should initially focus on isolated and strategic outbreaks, gradually working towards thicker infestations.

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STEP THREE: DEVELOP A FINANCIAL PLAN

- Estimate costs of the management strategies and control options for each priority.
- Integrate control costs into short term and long term property budgets.
- All costs should be considered, including the hourly running of machines and labour.
- Ensure that future costs are adequately measured, taking into consideration the amount of on-going control required.

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STEP FOUR: SCHEDULE ACTIVITIES FOR WEED CONTROL

- When developing a plan, take into consideration that after initial treatment, monitoring and follow up, control will also be necessary. Ensure that any treated areas are followed up within a year.
- Consider the effectiveness of control methods at different times throughout the year and balance this with the time available for weed control.
- Try to integrate weed control with other property management activities. For example, it may be suitable to organise a routine burn.

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STEP FIVE: MONITOR PROGRESS

- Use the map of the property as a baseline record of the problem before any control work had commenced.
- On the map, show previously treated areas and any new ones.
- Take several photos at the same location over time to show changes from control efforts.
- Incorporate monitoring activities into the yearly timetable and document control costs and resource requirements.

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STEP SIX: FOLLOW UP WHAT WAS STARTED

- Follow up control is vital as some level of regrowth is almost guaranteed.
- Identify areas from your monitoring activities that require follow up as a result of regrowth and seed germination.

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For optimum treatment results it is important to be able to first identify the cacti in which you are aiming to control. Below are a few examples of specific cacti identification features and herbicide treatment recommendations.

Haw/Prickly Pear (*Opuntia stricta*) - Common:

- Shrub or bush which grows 1-2m high.
- Hairless stems, of a dull green or bluish-green colour, consisting of a sequence of segments (cladodes) up to 30cm long, 15cm wide and 1-2cm thick each.
- Each areole comprises of short, fine, pointed bristles and occasionally, one or two yellow spines approximately 2-4cm long.
- Flowers grow to about 6-8cm in diameter and are lemon yellow with greenish or pinkish marking on the back.



Above: Prickly Pear (*Opuntia stricta*).
Source: [Agriculture Victoria, 2017](#)

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Harrisia Cactus (*Harrisia spp.*):

- Bright green, cylindrical stems of 25-40mm diameter and jointed every 300-450mm.
- Areoles that are situated approximately 50-70mm apart, containing 1-3 sharp, 10-35mm long spines. With age, spines become grey and black tipped.
- White flower that only opens at night and withers in the morning.
- Rope like, spiny cactus that forms tangled mats, only growing to approximately 600mm tall.



Above: Harrisia Cactus (*Harrisia spp.*).
Source: LR Tanner, [South East Weeds](#)

Tiger Pear (*Opuntia aurantiaca*):

- Dark green to purple-ish coloured stems which consist of a series of rounded segments. These segments are approximately 3.5-30cm long an 1-5cm thick.
- Areoles which display 2-7 greyish or brownish spines of 1-5cm in length.
- Lemon to bright yellow coloured flowers with large number of petals
- Fruit is green when immature and turns red or purplish as they mature. They are egg-shaped, spiny and fleshy.



Above: Tiger Pear (*Opuntia aurantiaca*).
Source: [North West Weeds](#)

Cacti Common Name:	Herbicide Name, Application Rate and Method:				
	Access™ 1:60 with Diesel Foliar/ Basal bark	Garlon™ 600 1:60 with Diesel Foliar/ Basal bark	Garlon 600 3L/100L of water Foliar	Grazon™ Extra 500mL/100L of water Foliar	Tordon™ Regrowth Master 2.5L/100L of water
Harrisia Cactus	✓				✓
Prickly Pear (common)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Snake Cactus	✓				
Smooth Tree Pear		✓		✓	
Tiger Pear	✓	✓	✓		
Tree Pear	✓				

Above: Reference table for herbicide treatment options for cacti species common to the South West.