



Opuntia stricta



CACTUS FAMILY

Cactaceae

COMMON NAMES

English: Australian pest pear, common pest pear, erect prickly pear, sour prickly pear.

DESCRIPTION

Succulent erect, spreading shrub [0.5–1.3 (–2) m high]; thicket-forming; modified stems called cladodes are blue-green, longer than broad (10–20 cm long and 7.5–14 cm wide); 3–5 areoles (raised structures or bumps on the stems of cacti, out of which grow clusters of spines) per diagonal row on each cladode; 1–2 straight and flattened yellow spines (1.5–4 cm long) usually restricted to marginal areoles as opposed to *O. stricta* (Ahw.) Haw. var. *dillenii* (Ker Gawl.) Benson where there are 4–7 (–11) banded spines (1.5–4 cm long) on most areoles.

Leaves: Cylindrical, minute and shed early.

Flowers: Yellow and large (5–6 cm long and 5–6 cm wide).

Fruits: Berries (fleshy fruits that don't open at maturity), green turning red-purple as they mature, egg-shaped (4–6 cm long and 2.5–3 cm wide), outer surface smooth with clusters of glochids (barbed hairs or bristles), narrowed at the base, purple sour pulp, white seeds.

ORIGIN

Ecuador, Mexico, Southern USA, Venezuela, and the Caribbean.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

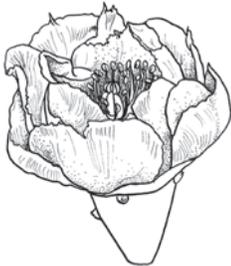
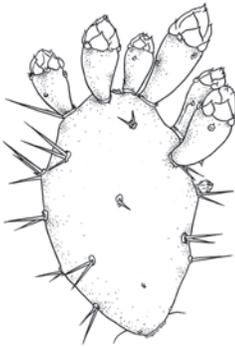
Hedge/barrier and ornament.

INVADES

Roadsides, wastelands, disturbed areas, rocky outcrops, savannah, grassland and riverbanks in arid to semi-arid regions.

IMPACTS

Can form dense stands, preventing access to homes, water resources and pasture. On Madagascar, *O. stricta* has invaded land used for crop and pasture production, and has encroached on villages and roads, impeding human mobility (Larsson, 2004). Here, the cactus has had a negative impact on native grasses and herbs, and it is even affecting trees by inhibiting their growth and regeneration (Larsson, 2004). The small spines (known as glochids) on the fruit, when consumed by livestock, lodge in their gums, on their tongues, or in their gastrointestinal tracts, causing bacterial infections, while the hard seeds may cause rumen impaction, which can be fatal, and which often leads to excessive, enforced culling of affected animals (Ueckert *et al.*, 1990). People who consume the fruits develop diarrhoea and may suffer from serious infections caused by the spines (Larsson, 2004). In Kenya, *O. stricta* infestations have resulted in the abandonment of farmlands.



Opuntia stricta (Haw.) Haw.

