

Bunny ears

Opuntia microdasys



Bunny ears is a cactus native to northern Mexico. It has now been found all over Queensland (Willows, Gemfields, Emerald, Springsure, Mackay, Sarina, Gold Coast, Brisbane) 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 bunny ears to stop its spread.

If allowed to spread, bunny ears has the potential to spread over considerable areas of Queensland.

Other common names are golden bristle cactus or polka dot cactus.

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.

Legal requirements

Bunny ears is a restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. The Act requires that all sightings of bunny ears plants 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 bunny ears 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.

Opuntia rufida is a prohibited invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and all sightings must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours.



Description

Bunny ears 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 white or yellow 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 similar cactus with red glochids instead of white or yellow. 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

Bunny ears prefers open habitats within arid and semi-arid rangeland. It has now been detected across Queensland, but likely to exist in gardens/rockeries elsewhere. Bunny ears has the potential to become abundant and widespread.

Bunny ears is dispersed mainly from broken segments and by people unknowingly giving potted plants away.

Control

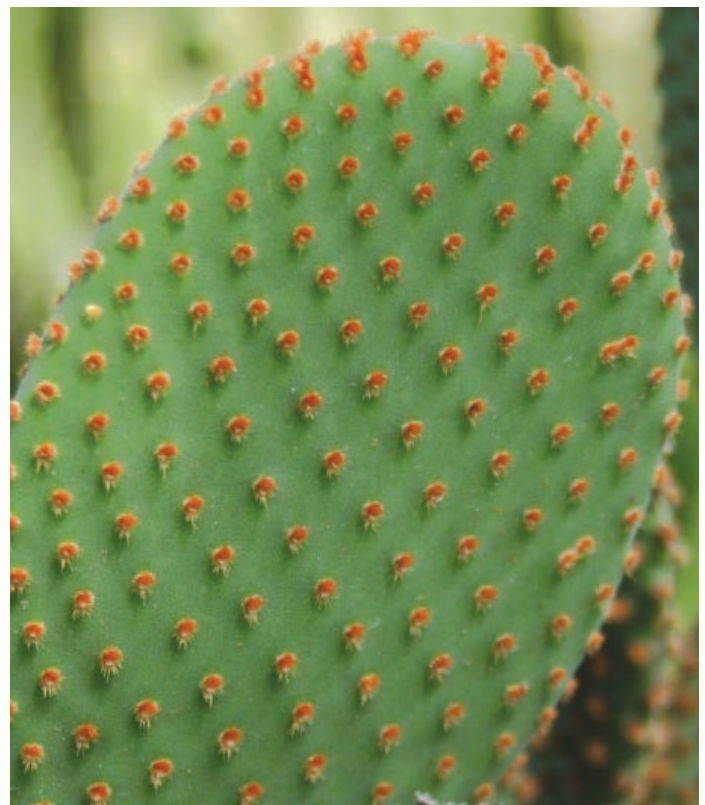
All suspected sightings of bunny ears plants must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland, which will work with the relevant person to control the plant. Anyone finding suspected plants should immediately take steps to minimise the risk of bunny ears spreading.

Further information

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



Bunny ears flower with white glochids



Opuntia rufida – similar cactus with red glochids

This fact sheet is developed with funding support from the Land Protection Fund.

Fact sheets are available from Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) service centres and our Customer Service Centre (telephone 13 25 23). Check our website at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this fact sheet 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, DAF does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.