

# 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.

The glochids of bunny ears may blind cattle and if humans come into contact with the glochids, it can have some health impacts causing skin irritation.

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.

**Possession, propagation and distribution of bunny ears as an ornamental plant are not considered reasonable and practical measures to prevent or minimize the biosecurity risks posed by bunny ears. In Queensland it is illegal to sell bunny ears on Gumtree, Ebay, Facebook, at markets, nurseries or any marketplace.**



**Queensland  
Government**

## Legal requirements

Bunny ears is a category 2, 3, 4 and 5 restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. The Act requires that all sightings of bunny ears 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 bunny ears until they receive advice from an authorised officer. It must not be kept, moved, given away, sold, or released into the environment.

At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive plants in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on bunny ears. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.

## 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 (golden) 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 and 3 cm wide. Fruits are a fleshy globular shape to 3 cm long and red-purple in colour.

*Opuntia microdasys* is a closely related to *Opuntia rufida* with white or yellow (golden) glochids instead of red-brown glochids.

## 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 bunny ears as a potted plant away.

## 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. It has the potential to become abundant and widespread. Bunny ears has been found growing in backyards as an ornamental plant.

## Control

### Managing bunny ears

The GBO requires a person to take reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks posed by bunny ears. This fact sheet provides information and some options for controlling bunny ears.

The best control for bunny ears incorporates integrated management strategies, including herbicides, mechanical, physical and biological methods.

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

### Physical control

The primary method of control is physical removal. This involves removal of all of the plant material for subsequent destruction. For advice on disposal options, contact your local government or Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

### Herbicide control

Herbicide control has not yet been undertaken, however, overall application of Access and diesel at a rate of 1:60 can be effective (APVMA permit PER11463 applies, expires 30/04/2027).

Landholders and contractors should check if the property is in a hazardous area as defined in the *Agricultural Chemicals Distribution Control Act 1966* prior to spraying.

### More information

More information is available from your local government or call Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au).



*Opuntia microdasys* with yellow (golden) glochids

