



1. Infestation in bushland near Wolston Creek in Brisbane. 2. Succulent leaves. 3. Older woody stem with clusters of spines 4. Cluster of creamy-white flowers.



Leaf Cactus (*Pereskia aculeata*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Leaf Cactus is a vine from Central and South America that has spread from cultivation as a garden ornamental in Australia. Unlike most other plants in the Cactaceae plant family, it has woody climbing stems and well-developed succulent leaves.

Distribution

This vine has been cultivated in the tropical, sub-tropical and warmer temperate regions of coastal Australia for many years. There are a few herbarium records of it becoming naturalised in northern Queensland, south-eastern Queensland and north-eastern NSW in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the number of records has increased over the last two decades, with most of these infestations occurring in the Brisbane region and in northern NSW. Single populations have also been reported from the Sydney, Sunshine Coast and Torres Strait regions.

Description

Leaf cactus generally grows as a vine with climbing or scrambling stems up to 10 m or more long, but it can have a shrubby habit when grown in cultivation. The older stems are woody and bear dense clusters of straight spines 1-5 cm long. Younger stems are somewhat fleshy in nature and hairless. They bear one to three smaller spines (3-5 mm long) in the forks of the leaves. These alternately arranged leaves (4-7 cm long and 2-4 cm wide) are somewhat fleshy and often clustered towards the tips of the branches. They are smooth and hairless, with entire margins and pointed tips.

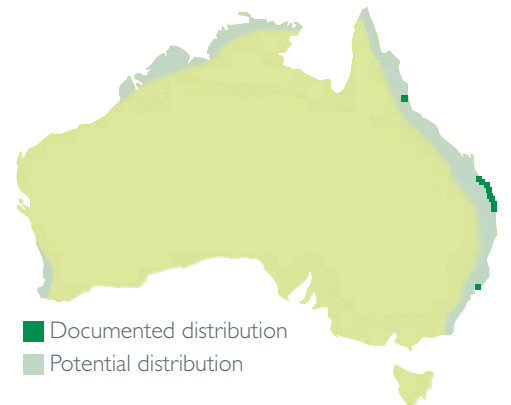
The white or creamy-yellow flowers (25-40 mm across) are borne in clusters in the leaf forks or at the tips of the branches. They usually have some small spines near their bases, as well as several leafy projections which can be easily mistaken for sepals. Each flower also has numerous stamens and several white or pale yellow 'petals' that can sometimes turn pale pinkish in colour as they age. Flowering occurs mostly during summer and the rounded fleshy fruit (15-45 mm across) turn from green to yellow and then eventually orange in colour as they mature. They eventually lose their leafy projections, and sometimes also their spines. Each of these fruit contains several black seeds.

Quick Facts

- > An aggressive woody vine with succulent leaves
- > Older stems covered with dense clusters of sharp spines
- > White or creamy-yellow flowers with several petals and numerous stamens
- > Rounded fleshy fruit that turn bright orange when mature

Habitat

This species is a potential weed of riparian vegetation, urban bushland, open woodlands, rocky areas and coastal environs in tropical, sub-tropical and warmer temperate regions.





1. Climbing habit. 2. Orange fleshy fruit covered with small spines.

Reproduction and Dispersal

Leaf cactus reproduces mainly by seed, but can also spread vegetatively via its fleshy stems. Seeds are most commonly dispersed by birds, and possibly also by other animals, which eat the fleshy fruit. Seeds and stem segments may also be spread in dumped garden waste or down waterways in floodwaters.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

This species is regarded as a potentially serious weed in the coastal areas of southern Queensland and north-eastern New South Wales, where it has a tendency to form large impenetrable clumps of vegetation on creekbanks and in conservation reserves. Because of this, it is on the National Alert List for Environmental Weeds, a list of 28 invasive plants that have the potential to threaten biodiversity and cause other environmental damage in Australia.

Control Methods

Leaf Cactus is difficult to remove by hand, because of the clusters of sharp spines on its stems. If hand removal is to be attempted, appropriate protective equipment should be worn (e.g. gloves) and disposal of the rootstock and all stem fragments is essential. This method should only be attempted with smaller infestations, and with great care, as it could lead to dispersal of stem fragments and the spread of the infestation to new areas if it is not done properly.

While no herbicides are currently registered for the control of Leaf Cactus in Australia, the use of several products is permitted for the control of invasive vines in Queensland via APVMA off-label permit number PER 11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER11463.PDF>). For larger infestations of this species, which usually cover other vegetation and reach a great height, foliar application is usually not appropriate. Hence, scrape and paint, cut and paste or basal bark application methods should be preferred in these circumstances.

Please read this permit carefully and refer to it for the appropriate products and rates to use. Unless otherwise stated in this permit, the use of any product must be in accordance with the instructions on its label. Within other state boundaries, it is recommended that all managers consult any relevant permits or government legislation applicable to their region.

Look a-likes

Leaf cactus is usually easy to distinguish from other species by the clusters of spines on its stems. A similar species, Rose Cactus (*Pereskia grandiflora*), is sometimes cultivated in gardens, but it can be distinguished by its more shrubby habit and bright pink flowers.



Top. Bright pink flowers of Rose Cactus.

Bottom. Similar woody stems with clusters of spines.

The control methods referred to in Weed Watch™ 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 utilisation 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, Technigro does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

*This information has been developed with the assistance of The IVM Group and Dr Sheldon Navie. Photographs are also courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie, Damien Boilley, Forest and Kim Starr.
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