

Wheel Cactus – Warning - Don't let this happen to your property



The problem

Wheel Cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) is an introduced weed from Mexico, is extremely invasive and has infested thousands of hectares of pastures and bushland around Maldon. Some infestations are now so dense the land is inaccessible and worthless. Wheel Cactus infestations have a significant negative impact on our natural environment, biodiversity and primary industry by displacing native flora and fauna species and decreasing the income of our farmers.

Legislation

Wheel Cactus is a declared noxious weed in Victoria under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* and is listed as a Weed of National Significance. It is also recognised as a noxious weed and must be controlled under Mount Alexander Shire Council Local Law, Clause 19 'Noxious Weeds'. Due to its status of "Regionally Controlled Weed" in this area, all **property owners must take all reasonable steps to prevent the growth and spread of Wheel Cactus on their land.**

Wheel Cactus I.D.

Wheel Cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) is just one of many different 'Prickly Pear' like species. But due to small biological differences in these cacti, only the Wheel Cactus species is highly invasive around the Maldon region. Wheel Cactus is easily identified by its very round-shaped lobes, while most of the other 'Prickly Pear' species have more oval-shaped lobes. Wheel Cactus also has a quite distinct bluey-green coloured flesh, with yellow flowers and large, purple-red fruit each containing hundreds of seeds. Wheel Cactus plants reproduce from both seed and flesh, but not from its roots.

Don't wait to control Wheel Cactus

Wheel Cactus is extremely robust and invasive, and will spread if ignored. **Plants need to be destroyed before they start to flower and bear fruit** to avoid further spread. The seeds from mature plants can germinate for up to 20 years and are spread by birds, animals and water. The plant lobes have waxy skin and don't absorb surface sprays, so the most effective treatments are by digging and burying or burning small plants, or injecting larger plants with herbicide. Wheel Cactus will regenerate from any piece of lobe; hence it cannot be dug up and left lying on the ground.

Cochineal Biological Control

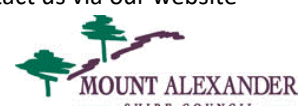
A biological control insect, Cochineal (*Dactylopius opuntiae*), is approved for Wheel Cactus. Biocontrol agents will never eradicate their host plant but are very useful as an additional treatment tool in a multi-pronged management strategy. Cochineal is very effective in dense Wheel Cactus infestations, but multiplies very slowly and can take years to become established. Heavy populations of Cochineal insects can kill small Wheel Cactus plants, but large, fruiting plants will always need to be injected with herbicide.



Tarrangower Cactus Control Group Inc

We are here to help! We're based in Maldon and our goal is to control Wheel Cactus in our environment. We hold Community Field Days around the Maldon area (check our website for dates and locations) where we demonstrate how to treat the plants and offer support and technical assistance. For more information, please contact us via our website

www.cactuswarriors.org or email info@cactuswarriors.org



How to Treat Wheel Cactus

Very Small Plants

- squash them under foot completely (until unrecognisable)



Small Plants

- dig them up and bury the entire plant under 0.5m of soil, or burn the plant on a hot fire
- N.B. It is ok to break off the roots and leave roots in the ground, this plant does not regrow from roots
- free disposal of dug up plants (Wheel Cactus only) is available at the Maldon Transfer Station (limited amounts)
- If you find a small, non-fruiting plant with **Cochineal insects** (as in this photo) please do not dig it up or inject it. These plants assist in maintaining Cochineal insect populations and spread, and will not produce cactus seeds, so do not pose a threat to the spread of Wheel cactus plants.



Medium Fruiting Plants

- Starting from outermost, inject all wheels (lobes) with 2-4 ml Glyphosate (120-150g/L final conc. in water)
- N.B. If only the inner lobes are treated, the outer lobes will fall off the plant and regrown into a new plant
- If you remove the fruit to prevent birds eating and spreading the seeds, dispose double-bagged, or incinerate

Large Fruiting Plants

- inject all wheels (lobes) with Glyphosate as above, or
- inject only the stem of the plant by first drilling a hole in the base of the stem then injecting 4ml of Daconate into hole (N.B. MSMA (Daconate) needs an Australian Chemical Users Permit to be able to purchase and use it)



It is essential to inject all mature fruiting plants to prevent the further spread of the seeds

Even if Cochineal insects are found on a fruiting plant it still needs to be injected with herbicide

Don't leave any part of a cactus plant lying on the ground, because it will regrow

How to Inject Wheel Cactus Plants

- Fill backpack with herbicide mix (as above). Lift backpack onto your back. Prime the injector gun and check that it's working properly by pointing the needle towards the ground and squeezing the trigger several times.
- Pierce the wheel cactus lobe from the edge towards the middle of the lobe, pushing the needle well into the lobe (see picture)
- Pull the needle back out about half way to form an empty pocket of air in the middle of the lobe
- Squeeze the trigger so that 2-4 ml of herbicide liquid is squirted into the empty pocket (N.B. If you don't pull the needle back there is nowhere for the liquid herbicide to go and it will squirt back out of the plant onto you)
- Remove the needle from that lobe
- Continue to do the same to at least all first and second outer lobes, or preferably all of the lobes on the plant
- When finished, rinse the gun and tube with water, and store the gun full of water to avoid corrosion of the gun mechanism



Caution

- Wear protective clothing, gloves, boots and glasses to protect against the cactus prickles and herbicide.