



EDUCATE

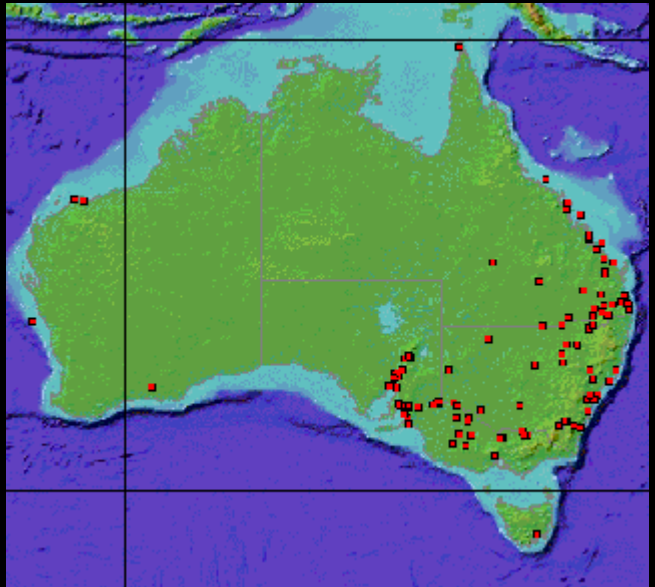
DESIGN

CONSULT

Prickly Pear Opuntia Spp



Photo Encyclopedia Britannica



Courtesy of Australian virtual herbarium

Description: Erect, perennial shrub growing 1 to 3 m tall. Green, succulent, flattened stems with scattered warts (areoles) and bright yellow flowers about 60 mm diameter in spring that form red, fleshy, edible fruit about 50 mm long.

As A Soil Indicator: Low Calcium, High Potassium, High Copper, Low humus in the soil, Sandy soils, Little biology, little moisture

Life cycle: Perennial. Seed germinates at any time of the year, producing a delicate bristly seedling that normally dies. After 3 years they may flower. Plants are very long lived and most new plants arise from stem segments that fall to the ground or are broken off. Drought tolerant.

Beneficial: Edible fruit. Fruit used for jams and jellies. Stem segments can be candied to form a chewy sweet. Young segments can be boiled and eaten as a green vegetable. In all cases the bristles must be singed with flame then the eyes sliced out. Some people have been known to use it in herbal remedies for whooping cough and diabetes. Eaten by stock during droughts. Honey plant.

Detrimental: Takes over areas excluding most other species. Sharp spines cause injury to stock especially the tongue and facial areas. The fruits are breeding grounds for fruit fly. Harbour vermin such as rabbits. Form dense impenetrable patches.

Toxicity: Causes 'wooden tongue' in sheep. May cause fibre balls in the stomach. Excessive consumption of fruit may cause kidney disorders in humans.