



HOW TO CONTROL PRICKLY PEAR AND OTHER CACTI: Individual Plant Treatment Pad & Stem Application or Top Removal Method

Robert K. Lyons and Megan K. Clayton*

Prickly pear is a valuable rangeland plant, but it can form dense colonies and interfere with the movement and handling of livestock, decrease forage utilization, and compete with desirable vegetation. Prickly pear are extremely tolerant of drought and harsh conditions, so they thrive across Texas, especially in the western half of the state.

Here are two methods to selectively control prickly pear that are easy, inexpensive, and environmentally responsible. One involves spraying a small but potent concentration of herbicide directly on the pads and stems to selectively control unwanted prickly pear. The second method uses a mechanical option to simply remove the top part of the plant.

These Brush Busters control methods were developed and approved by professionals with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas A&M AgriLife Research, both agencies of the Texas A&M University System. Your results may vary with weather and other plant conditions, but you should usually be able to kill 76 to 100 percent of treated prickly pear pads.

Remember, controlling prickly pear is not a one-time job. Both livestock and wildlife spread seeds and scatter pads that can root into new plants, so monitor your land regularly to control unwanted seedlings.

BRUSH BUSTERS PAD AND STEM SPRAY METHOD

Works well on: Relatively thin stands of prickly pear. Dense stands may benefit from a broadcast treatment first.

When to apply: Anytime throughout the year when there is adequate soil moisture, except during extremely cold weather. Absence of rainfall for extended periods after spraying may reduce plant mortality.

1. Prepare the Equipment

Many types of sprayers work well for this method. Backpack sprayers are the most efficient for small acreages or those with a high density of prickly pear. Larger places with lower densities may find ATV or UTV sprayers more efficient. An adjustable cone nozzle, such as the ConeJet™ 5500-X6 or X8 nozzle that can deliver a coarse spray, will be more efficient for smaller plants, while a fan-type nozzle may be best for larger plants.

2. Mix the Herbicide Spray

You can achieve 76 to 100 percent mortality by spraying with one of several herbicide options, including MezaVue (aminopyralid + picloram + fluroxypyr), Surmount/Trooper Pro (picloram + fluroxypyr), or PastureGard HL (triclopyr + fluroxypyr). To prepare the spray mix, add the selected herbicide at a 1 percent rate to water. To make sure the pads and stems are coated thoroughly, add a high-quality (80 to 90 percent active ingredient) non-ionic surfactant (see table on next page) to the spray mix or crop oil, methylated seed oil (MSO), or MSO-OS (organo-silicone) adjuvant at manufacturer specified rates. Add a dye, such as Hi-Light™ blue dye, to mark plants that have been sprayed and ensure proper coverage.

3. Spray the Prickly Pear

Adjust the nozzle to deliver a coarse spray in a wide pattern. Wet ALL the pads and stems of each prickly pear plant but not to the point of runoff. It is best to spray both sides of the pad for more consistent results.



Keep These Points in Mind:

- ▶ Follow herbicide label directions.
- ▶ Prickly pear may die very slowly, taking up to 2 to 3 years after application for potential plant mortality to occur.
- ▶ For best results, do not spray when:
 - Pads are wet from rain or dew
 - Daily maximum air temperature has not exceeded 50°F for at least 3 consecutive days
 - Working upwind of desirable trees, shrubs, or crops
 - Prickly pear growth is dense
- ▶ Cost of treatment rises rapidly as prickly pear becomes bigger and denser. Download the Brush Busters Cost Calculator app to easily estimate treatment costs.
- ▶ Large prickly pear plants may be used as quail nesting sites where bunchgrass is limited or serve as a food source for deer or javelina.

*Professors and Extension Range Specialists, The Texas A&M University System

RECOMMENDED PAD AND STEM SPRAY HERBICIDE MIX OPTIONS*

Ingredient	Concentration in Spray Solution	Tank Size			
		1 gal	3 gal	14 gal	25 gal
MezaVue, PastureGard HL, Surmount, or Trooper Pro	1%	1.28 oz	3.84 oz	18 oz	32 oz
Non-ionic surfactant	0.25%	0.32 oz	1 oz	4.5 oz	8 oz
Hi-Light™ blue dye	0.25-0.5%	0.32-0.64 oz	1-2 oz	4.5-9 oz	8-16 oz

*All spray solutions are mixed in water.

BRUSH BUSTERS TOP REMOVAL METHOD

Cut the main root of prickly pear 2 to 4 inches below the soil surface with a grubbing hoe or shovel. Remove the detached plants from the area or stack them on piles of brush. Remember, any prickly pear pads that come in contact with the ground have the ability to root and become new plants.

