

PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS

Opuntia stricta

- This Florida native cactus forms irregular clusters or shrub-like mounds that may reach over 10 feet tall.
- The pads are inconspicuous and are often thought of as leaves. These pads are actually modified “stems” and reach a length of 2 to 6 inches.
- Stem sections remain green with age and are covered with up to 3-inch long spines. It also has extremely small spines (glochids) located in numerous areoles. Areoles appear as small bumps on the pads, out of which grow clusters of spines—as seen in the photo of the young stem below.
- The flower is yellow and may have a tinge of blush at the center of the petals.
- The prickly pear-shaped fruit contains many seeds and is a deep red to purple when ripe.
- The fruit may be eaten and the seeds of the fruit can be roasted or dried and ground for flour. As a vegetable, the pads can be used in salads, casseroles, and soups, or grilled and prepared in a variety of other ways.

