Prickly Pear Cactus Control in Pastures¹
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Prickly pear cactus is not a problem in every pasture in Florida, but where it is found, it is often the biggest and most difficult issue to manage. Prickly pear is problematic for several reasons, one of which is the way it reproduces. The weed spreads primarily by fragmentation. This means that each pad has the ability to root and form a new colony if it is detached from the “mother plant.” This is an issue because many pasture managers use mowing as a means of controlling weeds and stimulating grass growth. But mowing prickly pear fragments the pads and dramatically increases the infestation. Although prickly pear doesn't form dense canopies and doesn't outcompete desirable forage grasses, its impact on grazing can be just as severe because of its barbed quills. Once the quills stick, they are difficult to remove and often break off in the skin, causing infection. Cattle are well aware of the quills and avoid grazing in the vicinity of prickly pear. This loss of grazing area can greatly decrease the amount of available forage in a pasture and can reduce cattle productivity.

Control

Spot applications
Traditionally, the most common herbicide program for prickly pear control has been triclopyr ester (Remedy Ultra, others) plus diesel fuel or basal oil. However, this program is costly since high rates of triclopyr are needed (20% solution) and grass injury around the cactus plant is very high. A better alternative would be fluroxypyr, the active ingredient in Cleanwave herbicide. Cleanwave can be applied in water as a 1% solution. Spray the pads to achieve good coverage but not to the point of runoff. Over-application

Figure 1. Prickly pear cactus.
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can result in grass damage but will not likely be as severe as with the triclopyr program.

**Broadcast applications**

Recent experiments conducted at the University of Florida have found that broadcast applications of Cleanwave herbicide at a rate of 50 oz/A, applied in either spring or fall, can effectively control prickly pear. Additionally, a split application of Cleanwave at 25 oz/A in the spring followed by another 25 oz/A in the fall was also effective.

It is important to note that though Cleanwave is effective on prickly pear, control is generally not rapid. After the application, the quills will turn gray and dry out while the pads will swell and turn a green/gray color (Figure 2). It is common for treated plants to persist this way for 6–8 months after the application. Just because the plants do not disappear quickly does not mean the herbicide isn’t working.

Consult your local county Extension office before applying Cleanwave to pastures containing grasses other than bahiagrass or bermudagrass.

![Figure 2. Prickly pear after herbicide application.](image)

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