

# HAVE YOU SEEN OPUNTIA?

## IF SO, TELL US WHERE!



Mississippi State  
UNIVERSITY

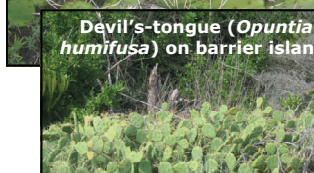


GEORESOURCES INSTITUTE, MSU

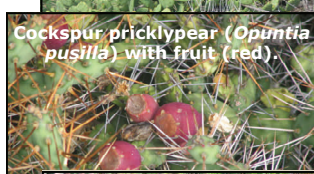
[www.gri.msstate.edu/cactus\\_moth](http://www.gri.msstate.edu/cactus_moth)



Devil's-tongue (*Opuntia humifusa*) with fruit.



Devil's-tongue (*Opuntia humifusa*) on barrier island.



Cockspur pricklypear (*Opuntia pusilla*) with fruit (red).



Cockspur prickly (*Opuntia pusilla*) with fruit (red) (Devil's-tongue at bottom left).

### Introduction and Problem

Pricklypear cacti belong to the Cactaceae Family and the Genus *Opuntia*. In the United States, it is a large genus of cacti with approximately 93 species.

Pricklypear cacti are being threatened by the accidental introduction of the cactus moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) into Florida and its recent range expansion to Pensacola on the Gulf Coast and Charleston on the Atlantic Coast. This moth, native to Argentina, is expected to reach Alabama and Mississippi within the next year.

The caterpillars of this moth are capable of complete destruction of entire plants and stands of cacti. This exotic pest is expected to have a catastrophic effect on the landscape of the western states and Mexico, if its range expands beyond Louisiana.

### Pricklypear in Mississippi

There are four common species of pricklypear (*Opuntia* spp.) native to Mississippi. Devil's-tongue (*Opuntia humifusa*), cockspur pricklypear (*O. pusilla*), and erect pricklypear (*O. stricta*) are native to Mississippi, while cow-tongue (*O. engelmannii*) is not. The fruit of the cow-tongue cactus, a southwest native, is sold in grocery stores throughout Mississippi. It is used in commercial and private landscapes as an ornamental. Cow-tongue cacti may persist at old home sites, but do not tend to be invasive. A key to these four common species can be found in the brochure.

Native species of pricklypear tend to be more frequent on dry sites, due to sandy or gravelly soils, or shallow soils over bedrock. Pricklypear are found throughout the state, from the old dunes of the barrier islands and adjacent mainland in the south to the chalk outcrops of the Blackland Prairies in the northeast to the sandy bluffs of central and southwestern Mississippi.

### Cactus Moth Survey Collaborators

U.S. Geological Survey  
MSU, GeoResources Institute  
MSU, Entomology and Plant Pathology  
National Forests  
Fish and Wildlife Refuges  
National Parks  
Department of Defense  
Bureau of Land Management Installations  
USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
Mississippi Natural Heritage Program  
Mississippi Department of Agriculture & Commerce (BPI)

### Web Database

An effort is being conducted to locate pricklypear populations in Mississippi. This information is in a web database at [www.gri.msstate.edu/cactus\\_moth](http://www.gri.msstate.edu/cactus_moth) for public and government agency access. This information is being used by agencies to locate pricklypear populations for cactus moth monitoring.

### Ways You Can Help

Assistance is needed from individuals who can volunteer to monitor stands of native cacti and ornamental cacti for presence of the cactus moth. In addition, reports of suspected infestations are needed. Individuals or groups willing to collaborate on this project should contact:

**Richard L. Brown, PhD**  
Department of Entomology & Plant Pathology  
Box 9775  
Mississippi State, MS 39762-9775  
Ph. 662-325-2085  
Fax: 662-325-8837  
E-mail: [moth@ra.msstate.edu](mailto:moth@ra.msstate.edu)

### Ways You Can Help

Information is urgently needed on locations where native and ornamental cacti are growing in Mississippi. Please send this information to:

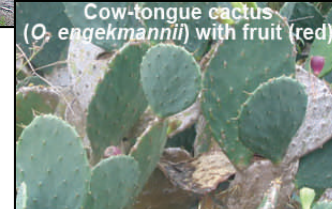
**Victor Maddox, PhD**  
GeoResources Institute  
Box 9555  
Mississippi State, MS 39762-9555  
Ph. 662-325-2313  
Fax 662-325-8742  
E-mail: [vmaddox@pss.msstate.edu](mailto:vmaddox@pss.msstate.edu)



Erect pricklypear (*Opuntia stricta*) with fruit (red).



Erect pricklypear (*Opuntia stricta*) with fruit.



Cow-tongue cactus (*O. engelmannii*) with fruit (red).



Close-up of cow-tongue cactus (*O. engelmannii*) fruit.