

# CACTUS GROWN IN CANADA? YOU'VE GOT TO BE JOKING?

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No Joke. A variety of cacti can be found in various regions of Canada, from the foothills of southern Alberta and plains of Saskatchewan to the south central region of Ontario. Many gardeners, looking for new and exotic plants have started to look at species of cacti that can survive the swings of the Canadian weather pendulum from high heat to extremely cold winter environment Canada has to offer.

One of the most successful cacti in southern Ontario has been the Eastern Prickly Pear Cactus?



The eastern prickly pear cactus is a low-spreading cactus found either in small patches or in large, scattered colonies made up of thousands of stems. The stems, often called pads, are covered with long, sharp spines and tiny barbs that are difficult to see.

The plant's flowers, which range from bright yellow to gold.

Although the eastern prickly pear cactus also has a fruit that ripens in the fall, in Ontario, these cacti tended not to reproduce sexually (i.e., through the dispersal of their seeds).



Instead, the plant propagates itself by means of its pads, which break off and take root in nearby soil.



### **Where is the Eastern Prickly Pear Cactus found?**

Canadian populations of the eastern prickly pear cactus are limited to extreme southwestern Ontario. (The only naturally occurring populations are found in the rare red cedar savannah habitats in the Carolinian Life Zone of Point Pelee National Park of Canada and Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve on Pelee Island. )

The eastern prickly pear cactus is widespread throughout central and eastern United States.

As with many other cacti species, the eastern prickly pear cactus needs direct sunlight to survive and thrives in the open woodlands, sandy ridges and dunes.



Home owners who have planted eastern prickly pear cactus in sunny, dry spots (usually next to asphalt driveway's, ditches, or rock gardens, find many passer buyer's doing a double take to confirm their first glimpse of what many consider to be exotic and indigenous to Baja or Mexico and not the great white north.



Applewood Acres Gardening & Landscaping has undertaken a number of projects this year for its residential clients in the Toronto area, who have opted to move away from traditional turf lawns in the direction of trying more interesting surrounding's such as the creation of perennial and rock gardens with a variety of native perennial's, including prickly pear cacti, that require less continuous maintenance, financial expense in terms of upkeep, water and fertilizing costs.



In most cases, the price of the prickly pear cacti can be higher than traditional plants or perennials ( 3 gallon pot which a single cacti 3" in height may cost as much as \$20), the reward in having such a desert exotic growing on your property is well worth it.

Given the right mix of soil conditions, location and sunlight and heat, a single prickly pear cacti in southern Ontario may replicate itself in a three year period to as many as five or six, and exponentially increase each year thereafter ( see photo's below).

If you are interested in utilizing the services of Applewood Acres Gardening & Landscaping in creating a rock garden, using Yucca (Adam's Needle) and prickly pear cacti, along with other native perennials, please contact Rick Brzakala, the owner at 905-281-3111 or email Applewood Acres at [applewoodacres1@yahoo.ca](mailto:applewoodacres1@yahoo.ca) , or visit their website [www.applewoodacres.org](http://www.applewoodacres.org) for more information.

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CACTUS IN WINTER TIME**

In southern Ontario the cactus goes into a dormant stage in mid-December whereby its moisture evaporates, leaving its pear shaped leaves shriveled looking and withered.



Come the spring and warmer weather, the cactus root system starts to regenerate energy and the growth cycle starts to re-generate energy into the plant. Growth begins in later March and early April.



**Other Information:**

[Hardy Canadian cactus could spell dollars for farmers](#)

[Gardens North](#)

[Map to Determine Plant Hardiness Zones \(Southern Ontario\)](#)