



## Topic: Prickly Pear Caterpillar

**Question:** We have a huge outbreak of caterpillars on a prickly pear and in a few days they have eaten it to the ground and are traveling to other plants. What should we do regarding it?

- MG, Sanibel

**Answer:** The Cactoblastic caterpillar is not an unusual occurrence at this time of year in prickly pear and other flat, fleshy pad cacti. The caterpillar is the product of a moth. It is native to South America where it has many natural predators, including ants, that keep the population in check. Unfortunately, these natural predators are absent in South Florida making this a most destructive pest of prickly pear cacti. Destruction is fast and no good treatment exists. Suggested insecticides to use include those containing Acephate, Imidacloprid or Spinosad. You should remove infested pads to slow down the advancement of the caterpillars and as another treatment alternative. If these are indeed the Catoblastic caterpillars, they should present no harm to your other plants.



### Useful Links

[Native Plants Fact Sheets](#)

[Stephen's Webpage](#)

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing [brownsh@leegov.com](mailto:brownsh@leegov.com). Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml>. For native plants click on Publications A-Z.

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