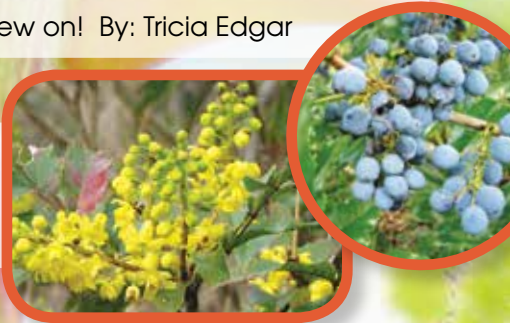


Why are some plants so prickly?

Plants can't run away from the herbivores (animals that eat plants) that want to eat their stems and leaves, so some armour themselves with prickly defenses. This makes them very unpleasant to eat. True **prickles** are an extension of the plant's outer layers or epidermis, while a **thorn** is a pointy piece of the plant's stem. Whether they have prickles or thorns, these BC plants are particularly hard to chew on! By: Tricia Edgar

Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) is often mistaken for a young English Holly tree due to its sharp piky leaves. An early nectar plant for bees, it also grows sour but edible blue-coloured berries. Photo credits: Rosemary Taylor B.C.



Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia fragilis*) grows in dry areas of BC. It blooms in the late spring and early summer and has large, yellow flowers that turn into pear-shaped fruits. Its prickly pads look like leaves, but they are modified branches that also store water. Photo credits: Rosemary Taylor B.C.



Trailing Blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) is a BC native (unlike its cousin the much larger Himalayan Blackberry). It tends to grow on low vines creeping along the ground, not on large bushes. Nonetheless, it has small, delicious blackberries – and tiny prickles. Photo credits: Chancelrie, CC.

Nootka Rose (*Rosa nutkana*) is a prickly shrub with a lovely pink flower. It defends itself with sharp prickles at the base of the leaves, but it is still an important food for deer. Many animals also eat the rose hips, including birds, squirrels, and bears.

Photo credits: andrey_zharkikh, CC
• hajninjah, CC



Devil's Club (*Oplopanax horridus*) is the largest of the prickly plants. It grows on long stalks in marshy areas and sides of streams in old growth forests. It has particularly large prickles. It has been honoured by local First Nations as a powerful plant with many medicinal uses.

Photo credits: Daphne Solecki, B.C.

Photo credit: Prickles Background: Todd Carnahan, B.C.

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