

Finkenstein Environmental Think Tank (FETT) Information Guide #1: CACTI AND OTHER UNWELCOME GUESTS

As people in the FHA Community who are also members of various environmental and scientific groups may already be aware, **certain animal and plants species are posing, or have the potential to pose, a threat to our fragile biodiversity here in Namibia.**

Specifically, you may know that across Windhoek – especially the road verges and open spaces (e.g., Avis Dam, the Botanic Gardens) – there has been an invasion by alien (i.e., non-native) cacti species that now requires the hard work of volunteers and sponsored clean-up campaigns if they are to be held in check. Once these plants spread into open areas from the gardens where they were originally planted, it then becomes very expensive (and extremely difficult) to eradicate them since they take over environments very rapidly indeed, out-competing indigenous plants – so it's in our best interests to try and stop this happening at our Estate.

There is no national legislation in place at the moment to address the proliferation of introduced species of plants and animals. And it is not yet the case that invasive plants – and specifically cacti – are proving to be a large-scale problem at the Estate, although this could well change in the future as a few invaders have already established themselves along the river walk and elsewhere in the veld. There are many reasons why they are undesirable, not least the fact that animals will attempt to eat them in a drought and our Namibian wildlife is simply not equipped to deal with the spines they might consume.

Therefore the Finkenstein Environmental Think Tank would like to share some information regarding plants on plots and in gardens at the Estate. This is especially relevant to people who did not build their own homes but who purchased an existing property – these residents may not be aware of the suitability (or otherwise) of the plants they could have 'inherited'.

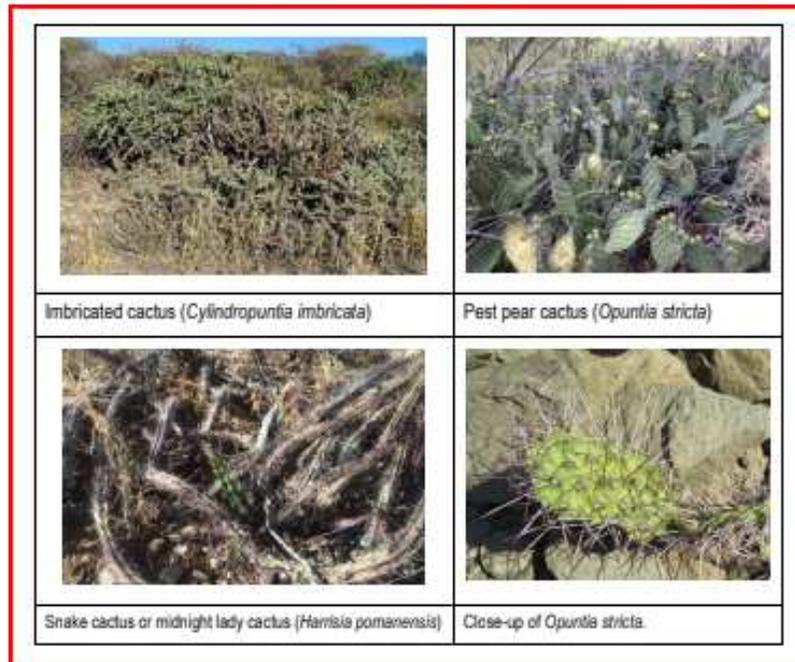
Of course we acknowledge that many people wholly unaware of the 'invasive aliens' issue will have already planted and cared for non-native plants without restriction over many years, i.e., without being requested to remove them from their plots to date. It's also probably unrealistic to expect people to only purchase and grow plants that are – strictly speaking – indigenous to the Khomas Highlands. These are not always readily available anyway, being difficult to propagate and grow, and unfortunately, many attractive, similar plants that have the potential to cause problems are still available for sale (for example, see the pictorial guide at: https://www.news-namibia.org/download/Invasive_alien_spp..pdf).

Plus of course people do like to see a few fruit trees, herbs and colourful blossoms in their gardens and these largely represent species that are not harmful to our natural environment. (And this is without getting into a debate about what constitutes 'alien' and what the parameters of 'recommended' might be!) *It's a bit of a thorny issue all round currently.*

It's therefore necessary to take a pragmatic and neighbourly approach towards minimising the effects of alien invasive plants in the future at the Estate. We would ask you, please, to plant no more invasive alien plants that have no place in an African setting (see the website link above and the leaflets now available at the FHA Office), and especially the notorious cacti shown on the next page. Try to limit your garden plants to those from arid areas that do not require a great deal of watering. Should you have a non-indigenous plant that dies, please think about replacing it with a 'local' alternative; and should you want to remove the cacti you do have, please be aware that you will need to dispose of them with care to avoid them spreading – the Estate Manager can advise on this.

The Estate Manager will also endeavour to monitor the plantings at new-builds on the Estate to ensure that, from this point onwards, no potentially invasive cacti or other problematic species are introduced, or useful native trees removed.

We are also going to remove the cacti already growing along the river walk and common-parts veld areas and once we have done this, we would be grateful if you could let us know if you spot any new cactus plants that emerge. The photos below are from the Namibia Chamber of Environment leaflet on these plants in case you want to know what they look like.



LEAFLETS SHOWING PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF AND AVOID PLANTING/GROWING, PRINTED BY THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF NAMIBIA AND THE NAMIBIA SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY (the latter sponsored by Leon Boye from WML Consulting Engineers), **WILL BE AVAILABLE AT THE FHA OFFICE IF YOU WISH TO HAVE A HARDCOPY RESOURCE.**

We are also aiming to provide our own leaflet in the future listing all plants that could be harmful to the Estate environment, and those that are 'good to grow' here. This will provide you with an at-a-glance resource.

Thanks for your co-operation on this important 'green' matter.

More information about prosopis species specifically is available here, as an example of the environmental degradation that one type of tree can cause in Namibia: <https://www.gondwana-collection.com/blog/prosopis-sought-after-at-first-then-rejected/>

And there's a very long document for people who want to investigate the general issue in more detail: http://www.the-eis.com/data/literature/National%20review%20of%20invasive%20alien%20species_Namibia.pdf