

HARVEST NOPALES

Harvest pads in early spring or after rains when pads are new. They will have small, pointed, succulent or rubbery "leaves" that will eventually become spines. Hold the pad with kitchen tongs and cut the base of the pad from the cactus.

PROCESS PADS

With a sharp kitchen knife, scrape off the spines, which are still soft and rubbery at this young stage. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a week.

EAT

Prickly pear pads make delicious additions to salads, egg dishes, and red chile. They have a slight tangy or lemony taste and constancy similar to cooked green beans. When ready to cook the pads, use a knife or the tip of a vegetable peeler cut or scoop out the spines on the flat part of the pad. (You can also do this before storing them.) Rinse the pad under cool water and then cut in strips or cubes. Cut up nopales into small cubes then sauté or boil them. Or place them right on the grill until they are soft and browned (or slightly charred on the outside!

NOTE: Nopales produce a gummy, healthy juice when cut. Cooking the pads will help reduce this mucilaginous quality. Be careful not to overcook them, as that can increase the gumminess. Pay attention to their consistency and experiment!

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DESERT HARVESTERS is a volunteer-run, grassroots effort in Tucson, AZ. We strive to promote, celebrate, and enhance, local food security and production by encouraging the planting of indigenous, food-bearing shade trees in water-harvesting earthworks, and then educating the public on how to harvest and process the bounty.

For more information about harvesting wild, cultivated, and native foods from the Sonoran Desert visit: www.DesertHarvesters.org.

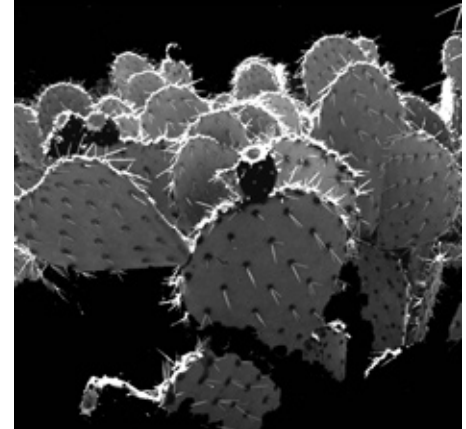
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PRICKLY PEAR FRUIT & PADS

FREE

ABUNDANT

NATIVE



THE DESERT CAN FEED YOU



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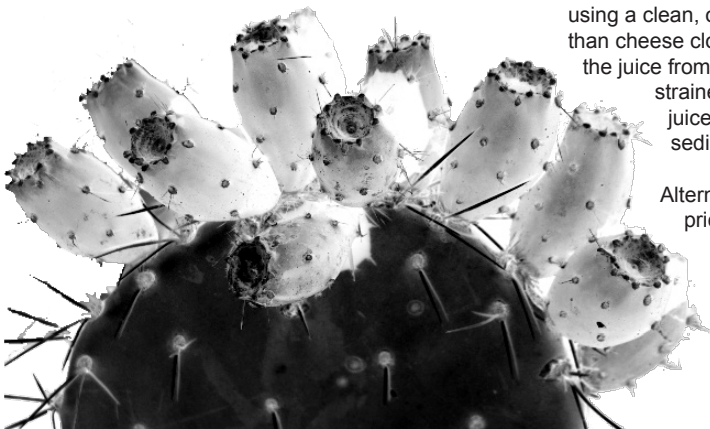
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www.DesertHarvesters.org
Now go eat some desert.

PRICKLY PEARS & NOPALES

Prickly pear fruit is a deliciously refreshing fruit celebrated for its vibrant magenta color, its unique flavor, and its cooling properties. Use it to make the regional favorites of prickly pear lemonade, syrup, or jelly!

The young tender prickly pear pads, called *nopales* in Spanish, are also edible and equally as delicious. High in vitamins A and C and calcium, this low-carb food also can help decrease blood glucose levels, which makes it a recommended food for diabetics.

There are 12 varieties of fruiting *Opuntia* cactus. *Opuntia engelmannii* or Englemann's Prickly Pear is native to the Sonoran Desert, and likely can be found very near your house. *Opuntia ficus indica* is a larger, cultivated prickly pear that is often thornless and therefore easily harvested.



HARVEST FRUIT

Look for prickly pear fruits, or *tunas*, as they're called in Spanish, that are dark red or purple in color. August and September tend to be the season in Tucson. Using tongs, simply pluck the fruit from the nopal pad. They should come off easily. The fine hairs on the surfaces of both the fruit and the pads are called glochids—they stick and prick, so you might consider wearing gloves as well. Though the cactus is abundant, be sure to leave ample fruit for wildlife and the new cactus generation.

PROCESS FRUIT

To process, first wash the fruit by placing it in a sink full of cool water and swishing it around with a large spoon. Then place whole fruits, glochids and all, into a blender or food processor. Blend to make a slurry. Strain the slurry through a pillow case, fine mesh strainer or a colander lined with cloth. We recommend using a clean, old t-shirt or pillow case rather than cheese cloth. Use a spoon to press

the juice from the seeds and skins. Let the strained juice settle. Gently pour the juice off the top, leaving most of the sediment behind.

Alternatively, you can put whole prickly pears in the freezer. To process, line a colander with a clean pillowcase or t-shirt and place over a bucket or large bowl. Place frozen fruits in the colander and allow to defrost (two to five hours).

Press on fruits with a wooden spoon as they soften to push juice through.

Freeze prickly pear juice in ice cube trays then transfer to airtight freezer storage bags. Pour the seeds in the yard to start a new prickly pear patch.

Pay attention as you work. Prickly pear juice will stain! Wipe counters and wooden surfaces immediately after use and wear an apron or old clothes when processing the fruit.



EAT

Prickly pear juice can be diluted with water or added to lemonade or other drinks to make a refreshing beverage. It can also be made into syrups, jellies, and jams.

Visit www.DesertHarvesters.org to find several prickly pear recipes. Additional recipes are found in *Eat Mesquite! A Cookbook*, also available on the web site.

NOTE: Prickly pear juice is very cooling. Do not consume high quantities of non-diluted raw juice as it is occasionally known to cause chills and body aches. Drinking a few glasses of lemonade is absolutely fine and will give you the cooling effect you're seeking in the dog days of August and the ever-lingering September summer.