
CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO

P.O. Box 21357

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87154-1357

<http://www.new-mexico.cactus-society.org>

THE EDIBLE PRICKLY PEAR--RECIPES USING FRUITS AND NOPALES

RECIPES FOR PRICKLY PEAR FRUITS

Fresh Fruit Salad: Mix chunks of prickly pears with any or all of the following fresh fruits – sliced bananas, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, apples, peaches, mangoes, etc. Stir in your favorite dressing or yogurt, etc., for fruit salads. Don't be surprised if the entire salad takes on prickly pear fruits' bright magenta color.

Prickly Pear - Blueberry Syrup for Pancakes: In a saucepan stir together 1 cup prickly pear juice, ¼ cup chunks of prickly pear fruits, ½ cup of fresh blueberries, and 1 Tablespoon cornstarch. Cook, stirring, over medium heat, until sauce becomes thickened. If too thick, add a little water and stir. Serve warm over pancakes. It's especially good with sweet blue corn pancakes.

Prickly Pear Cobbler or Pie: Because prickly pear fruits become very soft when cooked, use a firmer fruit with the prickly pear to give more "body" to the cobbler or pie. The best base is sliced Granny Smith apples. Substitute prickly pear fruits for one-third to one-half the apples in your favorite apple cobbler recipe or 9-inch lattice crust apple pie recipe. Another good fruit to pair with prickly pears is hard unripe pears or pears that have to be cooked to soften them. This will give you a prickly pear – pear pie, which is not only a tongue twister, but quite yummy, especially if you add a few snippets of candied ginger to the recipe.

Use your imagination and add prickly pear fruits to favorite recipes. Be sure to allow for the domineering magenta color and for the extra juiciness of the fruits. Niethammer's *Prickly Pear Cookbook* has numerous deserts, sauces, fruit salsas, and such for your culinary delight. Note: in cookie or bread recipes, prickly pear chunks usually turn brown when cooked, but the flavor is not affected. Prickly pear fruit in fudge is quite tasty, but mine did not set up, so I was forced to finish off my mistake by eating it by spoonfuls!

RECIPES FOR PRICKLY PEAR NOPALES

Percy's Chunky Nopalito Salad: Cook one 12-oz. bag of frozen *Birdseye Steamfresh Lightly Seasoned Southwestern Corn*. Add 1 can of black beans (drained), ½ cup nopalitos (nopales, chopped and de-slimed), 1 small can sliced black olives, ¼ cup chopped red bell peppers, 1 small can chopped green chiles (OR chopped pickled jalapeños to taste), ¼ cup chopped sweet onion, dry or chopped fresh cilantro, salt and black pepper to taste. Stir together and add one of these dressings: lime juice, OR oil and vinegar, OR Italian, OR Tuscan, OR Greek. Mix well, cover, and chill thoroughly before serving. Salad can be made a day or so ahead of time.

Nutritious Nopale Egg Frittata: Prepare the following "accessories," sauté them in butter and set aside to add later: chopped (de-slimed) nopales, chopped red or yellow bell peppers, sliced mushrooms, chopped shallots, purslane or spinach pieces. Beat together eggs and an equal amount of egg substitute with a small amount of milk. Stir in coarsely-ground black pepper, tarragon, basil, and garlic powder. In a large skillet melt butter, add egg mixture, and as it cooks lift the edges with a spatula to allow liquid to seep underneath and cook. Before the eggs totally cook, add the precooked accessories and continue to stir the eggs and veggies. When the frittata is done, put it on a plate and sprinkle finely grated cheese over the top. Keep warm and serve. Lots of vitamins, low cholesterol, low carbs, and not too many calories! This dish can be made for as few as 2 or as many as 20, but if you have a crowd, use several skillets or cook the egg in batches.

Vegetarian Nopale Soup: Simmer together until cooked and flavors blend: vegetable stock, strips of nopales (slime will cook off as soup simmers), chopped onions, chunky fresh garlic, zucchini chunks, diced carrots, celery (or try chard or bok choy stem slices), TVP (textured vegetable protein – optional), herbs of choice, diced jicama or turnips. For non-vegetarian version, use beef stock and add crumbled cooked sweet Italian sausage.

Other ideas: **add nopalitos** to canned soups, to stir fry, to chunky spaghetti sauce, to green chile stew, to posole. **Google® “nopale salads”**; there are numerous varieties available. Check Niethammer’s book for **condiments, salsas, and sauces** using nopales.

If you cannot find fresh nopales or do not have any frozen, you can find **pickled nopale strips in jars** at many groceries. These need to be rinsed, drained, and blotted to remove the brine. Then you can use them in recipes. The texture, however, is quite soft and the flavor is inferior to those you prepare “from scratch.”

RESOURCES

A Taste of Nature - Edible Plants of the Southwest and How to Prepare Them, Kahanah Farnsworth, Ancient City Press, Santa Fe, NM, ISBN 0941270939, 1997. *(For the adventurer who wishes to eat wild foods.)*

Cooking Wild, The Native Plant Society of New Mexico – Otero Chapter, Alamogordo, NM, published in-house 2004, reprinted 2011. *Booklet of recipes using numerous native plants. Recipes include cactus candy. (Obtain from club.)*

Edible and Useful Plants of Texas and the Southwest: A Practical Guide, Delena Tull, The University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, ISBN 0-292781644, 1999. *Includes recipes. (Available in Bosque del Apache Visitor Center bookstore.)*

Idonapshe – Let’s Eat Traditional Zuni Foods, Rita Edaakie, Zuni A:Shiwi Publishing, Ltd, The University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, NM, ISBN 0826320465, 1999.

Prickly Pear Cactus Medicine – Treatments for Diabetes, Cholesterol, and the Immune System, Ran Knishinsky, Healing Arts Press, Rochester, VT, ISBN 0892811498, 2004. *Studies cited pertain to species of Opuntia found in Mexico and southern California.*

The Prickly Pear Cookbook, Carolyn Niethammer, Rio Nuevo Publishers, Tucson, AZ, ISBN 1887896562, 2004. *The best recipe book, in my opinion. Includes nutrition info and ways to prepare the fruits and nopales for cooking. (Available in Bosque del Apache Visitor Center bookstore.)*

Wild Plants of the Pueblo Province – Exploring Ancient and Enduring Uses, William Dunmire and Gail Tierney, The Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe, NM, ISBN 0890132720, 1995. *Ethnobotany, usages of native plants by Pueblos and Apaches in NM. (Available in Bosque del Apache Visitor Center bookstore.) See also their other book Wild Plants of the Four Corners Region, ethnobotany pertaining to Navajo, Hopi, Ute, et al usages.*

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