
CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO

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RECIPES USING PRICKLY PEAR PADS (NOPALES)

Pick firm, blemish-free, new growth pads about the size of your hand. Hold pad with tongs and use knife to remove the pad from the plant. Pads will keep in the refrigerator for up to several weeks if wrapped in plastic. To clean off the spines and tiny glochids, hold the pad with tongs and scrap the little felt “knobs” and spines off, or try a kitchen peeler to remove the stickers and “eyes.” Wash well. Trim the edge with knife and rinse again. Cut edges will exude a sticky liquid similar to okra slime.

Before using pads in recipes, prepare as above and precook by one of the following methods to get rid of the slippery juice:

- (1) steam over boiling water for a few minutes;
- (2) cut into strips or chunks, coat lightly with olive oil, sprinkle with salt, and bake at 375 degrees for 20 minutes for slightly crisp nopales;
- (3) sauté in a little oil and water in a heavy frying pan, covered for about 5 minutes and uncovered another 10 minutes, stirring frequently;
- (4) grill oiled pads on hot grill for 2-3 minutes per side. (Most of these methods, plus others, are described in *The Prickly Pear Cookbook*, by Carolyn Niethammer.)

Cactus pads contain large amounts of Vitamins A and C, with some B vitamins and iron. The pads are high in fiber.

ARIZONA-STYLE SCRAMBLED EGGS (TRY Foods, Internat'l)

1 or 2 cactus pads, cleaned as above and sliced bite-sized 8 eggs, beaten
¼ lb cheese, shredded salt and pepper to taste

Sauté cactus chunks in butter for 5 minutes. Add cactus and cheese to beaten eggs, season to taste. Pour into heated skillet and scramble. Serve warm.

PORK STEW WITH NOPALES (TRY Foods, Internat'l)

1 or 2 cactus pads, cleaned and in bite-sized chunks 2 lbs lean pork roast, cubed
2 cups water 3 fresh jalapenos
1 clove garlic, minced 1 lb tomatoes, peeled, seeds removed, chopped
2 cups chicken stock salt and pepper to taste

Simmer pork in salted water 2 hours or until cooked and tender. Add nopales 30 minutes before pork is finished. In a blender puree until smooth the garlic and jalapenos with a little water. In a large pot place pork, nopales, puree, and tomatoes. Add chicken stock and simmer another 1½ to 2 hours. Serves 6.

NOPALITO SALAD (source unknown)

Use smallest and thinnest pads for tenderness. Scrape off spines and trim the edges. Cut into small pieces, less than ½ inch, and cook in well-salted water until tender. Drain and rinse thoroughly under cold, running water.

Mix together and set aside for 1 hour:

2 cups nopalitos	2 medium tomatoes, skinned, seeded, and chopped
3 Tbsps olive oil	4 tsps red wine vinegar
¼ tsp oregano	1/3 cup onion, finely chopped
½ tsp salt (or to taste)	6 sprigs fresh cilantro
freshly ground pepper (to taste)	

Line bowl with lettuce leaves, put salad on top. Garnish with strips of seeded jalapenos en escabeche, ¼ lb of sour cream or farmer's cheese, 1 small onion, sliced, and 1 medium tomato, sliced. Serves 6.

SOUTHWEST CACTUS SALAD (by Nancy Hutto, dwalandscape.com/Recipes.html)

Combine and toss: 2 cups diced nopalitas (precooked) 4 green onions, chopped
 ½ lb peeled tomatoes, sliced or diced ¼ cup lime juice
 2 Tbsps minced cilantro 1 bell pepper, chopped

Season with salt to taste. Cover and chill. Serves 8.

NOPALITOS CON CHILI (cooks.com)

4 small nopales (nopalitas), washed, de-spined, cut into small cubes, rinsed and drained
¾ lb chuck steak, cut into ½ -inch cubes ½ Tbsp vegetable oil
½ cup chopped onion (1 medium onion) ¼ cup chopped green pepper
1 large clove garlic, minced 1 Tbsp chili powder
1 cup tomato puree 1 cup water
½ tsp salt ½ tsp leaf oregano, crumbled
1 15-oz can kidney beans (optional)

Brown steak in oil in large skillet. Remove meat. In same skillet, sauté onions, green peppers, and garlic, stirring often, until tender. Add nopalitas and cook 3 minutes. Sprinkle chili powder over mixture; cook and stir 1 minute. Return meat to skillet. Add tomatoes, water, salt, and oregano. Bring to boil, lower heat, cover and simmer 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Drain beans, reserving about half the liquid. Add beans and liquid to skillet. Simmer uncovered 15 minutes. Serves 4.

SALPICON DE JAIBA Y NOPALITOS (CRAB & CACTUS PAD COCKTAIL) (from Martha Chapa [Oaxaca])

A tasty dish for hot days. Combine all ingredients and mix well. Chill for several hours. Serve in tall glasses. Serves 4-6

1 cup tomato sauce or pureed tomatoes 8 oz peeled and diced tomatoes
½ tsp Worcestershire sauce ½ tsp Tabasco sauce
10 oz cooked, flaked crabmeat 3 Tbsps finely chopped cilantro
3 pads (8 oz) cactus pads, cleaned, de-spined, cooked, and diced

PRICKLY PEAR SALAD DRESSING (made with the fruits) (from dwalandscape.com/Recipes.html)

This pretty pink dressing is thin like an oil and vinegar dressing, but lower in calories. Good on fruit salads and tossed green salads.

Shake all ingredients together in a covered jar:

½ cup prickly pear fruit puree (or juice) 1/3 cup salad oil (NOT olive oil)
1 tsp salt 1 tsp sugar
3 to 4 Tbsps tarragon white wine vinegar (have used raspberry white wine vinegar)

Refrigerate. Makes about 1 cup.