
CACTUS and SUCCULENT SOCIETY of NEW MEXICO

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THE EDIBLE PRICKLY PEAR--JELLY AND OTHER RECIPES FOR USING THE JUICE

PRICKLY PEAR JELLY, JAM, AND VARIATIONS

Supplies and equipment: **Non-aluminum kettle**, plastic or wooden **spoon**, 8 oz. **jelly jars, lids, and rings**, jar **lifter or tongs**, **pot holders**, 1 box of **Sure-Jell Pectin** (yellow box), **prickly pear juice** (including the lemon juice), **sugar**, and a **kitchen timer**. You will need a large glass **Pyrex measuring cup** to use in pouring the boiling hot jelly into the jars. Wash the jars and keep them clean and hot in a pan of simmering water. Keep the rings and lids hot (but don't boil) in a saucepan.

Ahead of time, measure out 3½ cups of prickly pear juice and 4½ cups of granulated sugar. Stir 1 box of Sure-Jell pectin into ½ cup of the sugar, then add slowly, while stirring, to the cactus juice in your jellifying kettle. Cook uncovered over medium high heat and stir well to dissolve the pectin mixture. Add a few drops of liquid margarine or a small snippet of butter to the juice to help reduce foaming. Heat to a rolling boil, stirring continually as the juice approaches boiling. Then add the remaining sugar, stirring continually. When mixture comes to a strong roiling boil, stir and boil for 5 minutes.

Turn off the burner. Using tongs, remove several jars from their pan, carefully empty the water, and set the jars on the counter. Carefully pour the very hot jelly into the Pyrex measuring cup. If there are floating globs of foam, use a spoon to remove them. Using the Pyrex cup and potholders, carefully pour the hot jelly into the jars, leaving about a ¼ inch space at the top.

Add a hot lid and ring. Use potholders to screw the lid on tightly. (*Careful! Hot lids and boiling jelly can burn.*) Invert the filled, sealed jar on a wire rack. After 10 minutes turn the jars back upright. As the jelly cools, the lid will make an audible pop as it seals and you will see a slight indentation. If the lid still bulges up after 24 hours at room temperature, you'll have to store that jar in the fridge.

Alternative methods: Process lidded jars in a hot water bath and then tighten lids down, OR use jelly glasses and top with melted paraffin to seal.

If your jelly does not jell completely after a few days, it probably won't. Do not despair. You now have **Prickly Pear Syrup**, which is nearly as versatile! Some years even Englemann prickly pears will not jell as well as usual.

Low-sugar Prickly Pear Jelly: Use *Sure-Jell Pectin for Less or No Sugar Needed* (pink box). Follow instruction and proportions for low-sugar sour cherry cooked jelly on the insert.

Prickly Pear-Cranberry Preserves: Combine 1 can whole cranberry sauce with enough cactus juice to total 3½ cups, and proceed as for jelly. Or add Craisins® to cactus juice to total 3½ cups. They will plump up as they cook.

Prickly Pear-Cranberry Jelly or Prickly Pear-Pomegranate Jelly: Combine 1½ cups of either cranberry juice or pomegranate juice with 2 cups prickly pear juice. Proceed as for prickly pear jelly.

Prickly Pear Jam: Add fresh prickly pear fruits to enough prickly pear juice to make 3½ cups total. Proceed as for jelly, or use proportions for sour cherry cooked jam recipe inside the pectin box.

For **low-sugar versions**, use the Sure-Jell *Less Sugar Pectin* and follow proportions for the cooked sour cherry jam. NOTE: Low-sugar jams, jellies, and preserves may not set as firmly.

Low-Sugar Prickly Pear-Orange Marmalade: Prepare 2 cups of marmalade base (precook chopped orange peel, lemon peel, orange pulp, lemon pulp, and water). Add 2 cups of prickly pear juice, 1 box of Sure-Jell *Less Sugar* Pectin, and 3 cups of sugar. Be sure to mix the dry pectin with some of the sugar before adding to the juice-marmalade mixture. As before, bring to a rolling boil, then add remaining sugar, bring to a rolling boil again, and stir while boiling 5 minutes. Then put into jars, add lids and rings, invert, etc., as for jelly.

Experiment! Use your imagination and your blender. Try other fruits with prickly pear juice, to make condiments such as **prickly pear-plum jam**, **prickly pear-tangelo marmalade**, or **prickly pear-cranberry preserves** using chopped fresh cranberries.

If you use other brands of pectin, remember to follow their measurement proportions listed under cooked sour cherry jelly or preserves.

Use your prickly pear jelly, jam, preserves or marmalade as a condiment on hot biscuits or toast or as an ingredient in other recipes. Use as a glaze for lamb, pork or chicken. Use atop cheesecakes or other desserts. Pair your cactus condiment with peanut butter on that old standby, the PB&J sandwich.

BEVERAGES WITH PRICKLY PEAR JUICE

Make these any time of year from your frozen store of prickly pear juice, to which you added ½ cup lemon juice to every 3 cups prickly pear juice before freezing. Make **prickly pear juice ice cubes** to keep in the freezer and add to beverages for flavor and color.

Festive Prickly Pear Punch: Combine equal parts of lite cranberry juice, diet lemon lime soda, and prickly pear juice in a large punch bowl. Add ice ring of cranberry juice or prickly pear juice. Float thin slices of lime or add strawberries in season.

Prickly Pear Lemonade: Add prickly pear juice to taste to lemonade. Sugar-free lemonade mix such as Crystal Light® will give you a low-calorie, low sugar beverage.

Prickly Pear Tea: Add a splash of prickly pear juice to chilled sun tea or to hot tea. Serve with a slice of lemon or a twist of mint.

Prickly Pear Smoothie: Prickly pear juice (or ice cubes or fruits) will blenderize well with numerous combinations of fruits, juices, yogurt (even tofu!), for nutritious smoothies. The prickly pear magenta will usually dominate.

Alcoholic and non-alcoholic Prickly Pear Margarita, Frozen Prickly Pear Daiquiri, Prickly Pear Sangria, Prickly Pear Arizona Sunrise: The list of beverages is limited only by your imagination. Add prickly pear juice or syrup to a bar recipe for the non-prickly pear versions. (I have refrained from a prickly pear version of the mint julep, however, as there are some elixirs that should not be adulterated, even with prickly pear!)

OTHER RECIPES USING PRICKLY PEAR JUICE

Prickly Pear Gelatin Salad: Stir together 1 small box of dry gelatin mix (strawberry, cranberry, or mixed berry) and 1 envelope of unflavored gelatin. Add 2 cups hot water, mixing thoroughly until dissolved. Stir in 1½ cups cold prickly pear juice and one 6-oz. cup of yogurt (plain or vanilla), blending until smooth. Instead of yogurt use cream cheese or cottage cheese or Kool-Whip®. Use of a blender is recommended for smooth texture. Chill until firm, stirring occasionally as the mixture jells.

Prickly Pear Ice Cream: Stir together 1 cup sugar, ¼ to ½ cup prickly pear juice, and 2 cups half and half. Chill the mixture. Process in ice cream freezer. Makes 1 quart of light pink ice cream. Google® recipes for **sherbets** and **sorbets** made with prickly pear juice.

Prickly Pear Vinaigrette Salad Dressing: Shake together in jar with tight lid: ½ cup prickly pear juice (or syrup), 1/3 cup salad oil (not olive oil), pinch of salt, 1 teaspoon sugar, and 3 to 4 Tablespoons white wine vinegar. Makes 1 cup. This thinner dressing is lower in calories and sugar than most bought dressings. Good on fruit salads or tossed greens. Pretty pink color.