

# HARVESTING & PROCESSING PRICKLY PEAR FRUIT AND MAKING PRICKLY PEAR LEMONADE PUNCH

When the desert is full of that gorgeous magenta fruit laden prickly pear (usually in late July/August), don't let the opportunity pass to enjoy the gift of the vitamin rich juice contained in those fruits . It can be obtained easily through either of the following methods and frozen in containers for use throughout the year.

Gather prickly pear fruit from your own property or with the permission of the property owner. Remember, it is illegal to gather plants, fruit, seeds or plant parts from City, County, State or Federal lands or roadways. Always leave some of the fruit for the animals.... they need food too.



## **METHOD I:** *(from Patsy Frannea)*

Using metal tongs, carefully remove fruit from the plant when it is at its deep, magenta-colored ripeness peak and place in a large pail. You can usually tell when it starts to fall off the plant or you see signs that the birds are starting to feast on it. If the fruit is still green where it attaches to the pad it is not quite ripe. I usually try to leave some fruits on the plant around the edges for the animals to easily reach for their share. Note: Use caution when picking and handling the fruit... especially on a windy day. The small short reddish stickers (glochids) can easily become airborne and land on you and stick in your skin or worse, get in your eyes.

Rinse the desert dirt off of the fruits and discard any damaged or diseased pieces. Then use tongs to load a batch into your blender. Process quickly until liquefied and pour the liquid mixture into a fine mesh strainer or a colander lined with cheesecloth that has been placed over a large bowl. This will strain out all of the seeds and stickers and you will have a prickly pear juice that can be used or frozen for drinks, sauces, syrups, jellies, etc. Toss the pulp in your compost pile. You can do a two step straining process using a coarse screen first then the fine to make the process go faster. Be sure to refrigerate the juice immediately after straining and freeze if not used within a day or two because it tends to sour quickly.

## **METHOD II:** *(from Faye Libbey)*

Pick the fruit off of the plant as described in Method I. Rinse and use tongs to load into plastic bags. Freeze the bags of fruit for at least a couple of days. Remove from freezer and dump fruit into a strainer or colander as described above. The freezing will have softened the fruit and when thawed the juice will easily flow to be strained for your use.

## **RECIPE for PRICKLY PEAR LEMONADE** *(from Patsy Frannea)*

To make Prickly Pear Lemonade like we serve at the TCSS meetings and cactus sales events, just mix a can of frozen lemonade, one can of water, 1/4 to 1/2 cup of prickly pear juice and 2 cans (or more to taste) of any lemon/lime soda.

An Internet search for prickly pear recipes will give you lots of ideas for using the juice.

**NOTE:** While the above have used these methods and recipes for years, you assume your own risk and responsibility for any picking, processing, and use of cactus fruit.