

# 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 summer), don't let the opportunity pass to enjoy the gift of the vitamin rich juice contained in those fruits. It can be processed 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 public roadways without written permission. Always leave some of the fruit for the animals, they need food too.



## **METHOD I:** (Blender)

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. Do not touch fruit with gloves. 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 until liquefied and pour about 3/4 ths. of 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 or three 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. Freeze if not used within a day or two because it tends to sour quickly. Note: leaving some juice in the blender helps the next batch liquify quickly. Always put the top on the blender jar. This juice can permanently stain.

## **METHOD II:** (Freezer)

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 that is set over a large bowl. The freezing will have softened the fruit and when thawed the juice will easily flow into the bowl.

## **RECIPE for PRICKLY PEAR LEMONADE**

To make Prickly Pear Lemonade like we serve at the TCSS meetings and cactus sales events, just mix a 12 oz. can of frozen lemonade, one 12 oz. can of water, 1/4 to 1/2 cup of prickly pear juice and 2 cans (24 oz. more to taste) of any lemon/lime soda. Local authors have great recipes. An Internet search for prickly pear recipes may also give you ideas for using the juice. Jelly, jam, syrups, sauces, margaritas, wine coolers, gelato, sorbet and other desserts are some of them.

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