

Prickly Pear



Selecting

Prickly pears are native to the tropical regions of the Americas. They are a member of the *Opuntia* cactus family with more than 300 species, but the type you'll most often see in the supermarket is commonly known as cactus pears or prickly pears.

Prickly pears may range in colour from yellow-green, which are less sweet, to a deep magenta. Select a fruit that is firm, heavy for its size, and with a smooth skin. The fruit will yield to gentle pressure when ripe.

Storing

Firm prickly pears will ripen and soften at room temperature in a few days. Store ripe fruits in the crisper drawer

of the refrigerator, unwashed for up to 1 week. Alternatively, you can store the fruit in the freezer. This will break down the fruit but it will still be useful to make juice or jams.

Preparing

Prickly pears taste best when cold. Try refrigerating them before eating. Prickly pears sold in stores will already have their main spines removed. However, they can still have tiny barbed hairs that can be irritating to the skin. To prepare, slice both ends off the prickly pear. Make a lengthwise cut down the body and use your fingers or fork to peel the rest of the skin off completely. Discard the skin. The flesh includes many little seeds, which can be eaten, if desired.

You can also extract the juice by placing the flesh of a prickly pear into a blender or food processor and blending until smooth. Use a sieve to capture the seeds and any remaining thick pulp, and use the juice as desired. Depending on the size, 6 to 12 prickly pears will yield about 1 cup (250ml) of juice.

Eating

Ripe prickly pears are very sweet with a distinctive flavour. Some describe their taste as a cross between watermelon, strawberries, and raspberries. They are very juicy and filled with edible seeds. They are great for both sweet and savoury recipes. Try these delicious ideas:

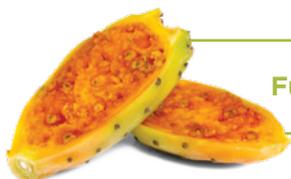
- Serve it on top of yogurt, salads, or mix in salsas
- Purée the fruit to make smoothies, sauces, dressings, or jams
- Puréed fruit can be frozen to use in sorbets or chilled beverages

Seasonality

The peak season for prickly pears is late summer through early winter, September to December.

Nutrition

Prickly pears (140 g portion) are an excellent source of magnesium, high in fibre, and a source of calcium, potassium, vitamin C and vitamin B6.



Fun Fact In Mexico, the prickly pear is known as “cactus candy.”

