

Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia*)

Commonly used in landscaping, the Prickly Pear is the only cactus native to the eastern United States. Its flat, succulent, leaf-like structures are known as platyclades or Nopales. These can be boiled or grilled, and have a flavor similar green beans, with an okra-like texture. Nopales sap can also be used as a hair conditioner. The fruit of the Prickly Pear, called cactus fig, Indian fig, or *tuna*, is a beautiful deep purple color. Its delicate flavor can be enjoyed in jellies, beverages (lemonades and lemon margaritas), and sorbets; the fruit can also be eaten fresh. Plant parts must be harvested and prepared with care (Wear thick gloves!) in order to avoid touching or ingesting the plant's protective spines. Harvest the fruits using a twisting and bending motion. Rub the fruits gently with your gloves or a towel to remove thorns. Cut in half and scoop out the flesh. For more on preparation, visit: <http://www.wikihow.com/How-to-Eat-Prickly-Pear-Cactus>

Our plants are clones of a cactus grown by Farmer John of Starke, whose fruits are the best we've sampled, and are really fantastic—they are an incredible purple and full of flavor. They flower in the spring, and the deep purple fruits start to ripen in September. They stay good all winter until picked. The plant and fruit are impervious to frost.

Our potted cactuses grow faster and flower and fruit better when the soil is enriched. Weeding can be difficult (because of the spines which will grab you even if you brush by the plant ever so gently) so plant in full sun in a place where weeds are scarce! The cactus will grow into a large mound; some of the old ones are 20 feet wide and eight feet tall.

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