



Tucson Community Supported Agriculture

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Summer 2011

Harvest list is online

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Prepping Verdolagas (Purslane)

Verdolaga is a vegetable green used in many Latin American countries. It is also popular as a salad green in France and other European countries. It is similar in flavor to watercress.

Most of us know it as the herbaceous weed commonly named purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*). There are cultivated varieties that grow in a more upright fashion than the weed.

In Mexico it is often used as a thickener in stews.

Both the succulent leaves and the stems of verdolagas are edible. You may want to discard the lower half of the stem, though, depending on its size and how you plan to use it in your cooking. For salads, use only the most tender top few inches, chopping into bite size pieces.

Gently remove the leaves from the base of the stem to use as well. For cooking, use any stem that is not fibrous, chopping stem and leaves together into bite size pieces. Like other greens, verdolagas need to be well cleaned by dunking in water and swishing to remove any grit.



PRICKLY PEAR HARVESTING

Surely you've seen those oval-shaped purple fruits that appear at the ends of prickly pear cactus this time of year! That's prickly pear fruit or *tunas*, in Spanish. Prickly pear is a deliciously refreshing fruit celebrated for its vibrant magenta color, its unique flavor, and its cooling properties. Use it to make the regional favorites of prickly pear lemonade, syrup, or jelly!

There are 12 varieties of fruiting *Opuntia* cactus. *Opuntia engelmannii* or Englemann's Prickly Pear is native to the Sonoran Desert, and likely can be found very near your house. *Opuntia ficus indica* is a larger, cultivated prickly pear that is often thornless and therefore easily harvested.

Look for prickly pear fruits that are dark red or purple in color. August and September tend to be the season in Tucson. Using tongs, simply pluck the fruit from the nopal pad. They should come off easily. The fine hairs on the surfaces of both the fruit and the pads are called glochids—they stick and prick, so you might consider wearing gloves as well. Though the cactus is abundant, be sure to leave ample fruit for wildlife and the new cactus generation.

To process, first wash the fruit by placing it in a sink full of cool water and swishing it around with a large spoon. Then place whole fruits, glochids and all, into a blender or food processor. Blend to make a slurry. Strain the slurry through a pillow case, fine mesh strainer or a colander lined with cloth. We recommend using a clean, old t-shirt or pillow case rather than cheese cloth. Use a spoon to press the juice from the seeds and skins. Let the strained juice settle. Gently pour the juice off the top, leaving most of the sediment behind.

Alternatively, you can put whole prickly pears in the freezer. To process, line a colander with a clean pillowcase or t-shirt and place over a bucket or large bowl. Place frozen fruits in the colander and allow to defrost (two to five hours). Press on fruits with a wooden spoon as they soften to push juice through.

Freeze prickly pear juice in ice cube trays then transfer to airtight freezer storage bags. Pour the seeds in the yard to start a new prickly pear patch.

Pay attention as you work. Prickly pear juice will stain! Wipe counters and wooden surfaces immediately after use and wear an apron or old clothes when processing the fruit.

Prickly pear juice can be diluted with water or added to lemonade or other drinks to make a refreshing beverage. It can also be made into syrups, jellies, and jams.

Visit <http://www.DesertHarvesters.org> to find several prickly pear recipes. Additional recipes are found in *Eat Mesquite! A Cookbook*, available on the Desert Harvesters' web site and at the CSA.

NOTE: Prickly pear juice is very cooling. Do not consume large quantities of non-diluted raw juice as it is occasionally known to cause chills and body aches. Drinking a few glasses of lemonade is absolutely fine and will give you the cooling effect you're seeking in the dog days of August and the ever-lingering September summer.

Adapted from *The Pocket Guide to Harvesting Prickly Pear Fruit and Nopales*, by Desert Harvesters. 2011. Available for free download at www.DesertHarvesters.com.

Turkish Purslane Salad

Sara Jones, Tucson CSA

This is a simple, easy way to prepare purslane. Add diced, cooked potatoes and garbanzo beans to this recipe to make a really nice potato salad.

½ bunch purslane, cleaned, large stems removed, and roughly chopped
1 large clove garlic, minced
Juice from ½ lemon
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/3 cup plain yogurt
Red chile flakes, to taste
Salt, to taste

In a jar with a lid, combine garlic, lemon juice, oil, yogurt and salt. Cover and shake, until well mixed and pourable. Pour mixture over purslane (and beans and potatoes, if using) and stir to coat. Sprinkle with red chile flakes and serve.

Verdolaga (Purslane) and Walnut Pilaf

Lorraine Glazar, Tucson CSA, adapted from a recipe in Sunset Magazine

1 small to medium onion, chopped
2 teaspoons oil
1 cup rice
2 cups water, stock or broth
1 share verdolagas, washed and chopped
½ cup toasted walnuts
Salt and pepper to taste

Sauté the chopped onion in the oil until golden. Toss the rice in the pan until it is coated with oil. Add the liquid of choice and bring to a boil. Cover the pan and cook until all liquid is absorbed, 20 minutes to an hour (brown rice will take longer and may require a little more liquid). When rice is tender, toss in verdolagas and walnuts, season to taste, and serve it forth!

Cucumber-Apple Shake

Jessica Weinberg, Tucson CSA

1/3 cup plain unsweetened soy milk
½ large Armenian cucumber
2 small cored Anna apples, cut up into pieces
8 ounces plain nonfat yogurt
½ (approx.) cube of fresh peeled ginger
1 tablespoon lime juice
½ teaspoon orange-flavored liquid Stevia (herbal sweetener)

Pour soy milk into blender, then add remaining ingredients. Blend until smooth. Makes enough for 1-2 people.

Caponata

Sara, Tucson CSA

There are many variations of Caponata, a traditional eggplant and tomato dish. It is often served cold as a topping for crusty bread or as a dip. This recipe is also good hot, served over pasta or rice.

1 large or 2-3 small eggplants, diced
1 onion, diced
1 large tomato, chopped
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 teaspoons crushed cumin seeds
1 teaspoon crushed coriander seeds
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste

Sauté onion and spices in oil over medium heat to release fragrance. Add eggplant, cover and cook for about 5 minutes. Reduce heat to low and stir in tomatoes and vinegar. Cover and cook until everything is tender and smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot or cold.

Old Fashion Maine Mustard Pickles

Kristin Terpening, Tucson CSA

Here's a super easy recipe for slightly spicy, very crunchy pickles from a woman I worked with at a boatyard in Maine.

2 heaping tablespoons sugar
1 heaping tablespoon canning salt
1 heaping tablespoon dry mustard
Apple cider vinegar- enough to fill quart jar packed with Cucumbers packed 2/3 full in quart jar
Cold water- enough to top off quart jar of cucumbers

I also like to add at least a heaping tablespoon of chopped garlic or several individual cloves, and sometimes a red chile or two.

Cut cukes into quarters, spears, or slices. Pack into quart size jar. Add dry ingredients. Fill jar 2/3 with cider vinegar. Then add cold water to fill the jar to the brim. Shake well, and again shake jars every once in a while for the next 24 hrs or whenever you think of it. (If you keep them somewhere easily visible, just give 'em a shake every time you pass by.) Since these aren't cooked or actually canned, it's best to keep them in the fridge for storage.