



COOKING WITH CACTI

Learn to cook with these prickly plants!

ABOUT CACTI

Cacti are members of the Cactaceae family, which includes approximately 1,750 known species. Cacti are exclusively native to the Americas, though they have been naturalized around the globe.

In Iowa, there are three native species of cactus all within the *Opuntia* genus!

Opuntia, commonly called the prickly pear or paddle cactus, is a genus of cacti known for their edible parts. The prickly pear fruit, called cactus fig or tuna in Spanish, is edible after it is carefully peeled to remove the outer skin and spines. The stem segments, called pads or nopales, are a common ingredient in Mexican cuisine.

Nopales are generally sold fresh, cleaned of spines and sliced. For this recipe we will be using the canned nopalitos, which are cut into slices and have a light, slightly tart flavor, similar to green beans.



Opuntia cactus with ripe fruits.



Opuntia cactus fruit with spines removed.



Fresh *Opuntia* nopales cleaned and sliced.



Opuntia humifusa, native Iowa cactus in the Dorothy and Max Rutledge Conifer Garden.



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NOPALES SALSA



INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups fresh tomato, chopped
- 1/2 cup chopped Nopalitos (Nopales canned in brine. We recommend visiting a Latin American grocery store to find this.)
- 1/2 cup sweet pepper, chopped
- 2 tablespoons red onion, chopped
- 1-2 tablespoons cilantro, finely chopped
- Juice from one lime
- A pinch of salt

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine ingredients in a food processor. (If you don't own a food processor, you can finely chop ingredients and mix by hand, or it can also be made in a blender.)
2. Pulse until mixture is combined and the desired texture is reached.
3. Pulse longer if you prefer smooth salsa, or stop if you like a chunkier salsa.
4. Taste and adjust cilantro, lime juice and salt to your liking.
5. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve chilled with your favorite tortilla chips. Enjoy!

This salsa should last up to a week if stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.