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# Prickly Pear Appeal

ONE AUGUST AFTERNOON IN 1996, my wife and I discovered that the several acres of Engelmann's prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii*) growing neglected in a vacant lot behind our Tucson, Arizona, home were loaded with ripe fruit, known as *tunas* in Spanish. Despite the blistering heat, we couldn't resist—and we picked about six bushels. Armed with a pair of taco tongs, we gingerly separated the purple fruit from the blue-green pads.

After processing the fruit into delicate, magenta-colored juice, I drank my first sip. The taste of unsweetened prickly pear juice was deep and mysterious, like a cross between cranberries and watermelon rind.

We put up jars of prickly pear jelly and prickly pear pancake syrup. Later, we found other uses for the juice: we mixed it into lemonade (which gives it a refreshing, slight-

ly tart melon taste), whipped it into sorbets and salad dressings, and used it to glaze pork loin. Our favorite, and perhaps its highest and best use, is as the main ingredient in a delicious margarita (see recipe below).

I now teach a popular class on prickly pear cooking at the nursery I manage. If you come, you will learn the subtleties of harvest

and preparation. You will not eat any stickers, and you will savor lemonade the color of an Arizona sunset. Our 2003 class meets on Saturday, August 9 at 9 A.M. and it's free. For more information, write Civano Nursery, 5301 South Houghton Road, Tucson, AZ 85747, or call 520-546-9200.

—Scott Calhoun

## Nuclear Sunset Margaritas



1/4 cup lemon juice	1/3 cup prickly pear juice
1/4 cup lime juice	1/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup high-quality tequila	1/4 cup triple sec
1 cup cold water	1 tbsp. orange zest

Stir together lemon and lime juices, tequila, triple sec, prickly pear juice, and water until sugar dissolves. Serve over ice; garnish with orange zest. Serves 2.