



Prickly Pear Cactus Jelly!

BY GARY LOCHTE

Have you noticed the abundance of prickly pear fruit this summer? The fruits are prolific, exceptionally nutritious, and the treats you can make from them are truly wonderful.

Last weekend I picked a 5 gallon bucket of the beautiful prickly-pear fruit and made jelly. It is so wonderful and beautiful that I had to share it with you.

What to do: if you don't have prickly-pear nearby, a short drive thru the hill country will reveal ample quantities. If found on private land, offer the owner several jars of jelly in exchange for access to the beautiful fruit.

It is important to remember why this plant is called Prickly Pear Cactus.... they are prickly!

The beautiful fruit are protected by sharp thorns, called "glochids". The thorns easily penetrate gloves, so I recommend using a pair of long handle kitchen tongs to remove the purple fruit. Twist, and pull to remove fruit from the thorny paddles, also called "nopales". Use the tongs to hold the fruit as you burn off the glochids by holding them over your stove's gas burner. You may also purchase a small propane burner from the hardware store with good results. One gallon cactus tunas, also called Prickly

Pear Fruit

1/2 cup lemon juice

1 1/2 boxes of fruit pectin

6 cups sugar

Gather about one gallon of cactus tunas (prickly pear fruit), and burn the stickers from each tuna over a natural gas or propane flame. A long handle kitchen tong, ice pick, or fondue form is handy for holding the fruit during this process.

Now scrape away the burned thorn (glochid) residue from the fruit with the edge of a sharp knife.

The fruit can now be peeled easily, but rubber gloves are recommended to keep the

juice from dyeing your hands purple.

Cut the peeled fruits into quarters and place them in a saucepan, seeds and all, with just enough water to show through the fruit. You may also puree the fruits, or use a potato masher until the fruit looks like purple mashed potatoes.

Bring the water to a gentle boil, cover, and allow the fruit to cook for about an hour.

Strain the juice from the pulp and seeds. Cheesecloth works very well for straining. The purpose is to remove all the tiny, granite like seeds.

To 3 3/4 cup of juice add 1/2 c. of lemon juice and 1 1/2 boxes of fruit pectin. Bring this mixture to a boil and add 6 c. of sugar.

Allow the mixture to cook for three minutes. Remove the jelly from the heat and allow it to cool for 45 minutes; skim off the foam and pour the jelly into hot, sterilized jars. Seal the jars immediately with canning lids. Be sure to "water bath" can by boiling the jars at least 12-15 minutes. Let the jars cool and rest for at least 12 hours.

Now you are ready to enjoy your beautiful Prickly Pear Cactus Jelly!

