



3 easy ways to eat cactus

Did you know?

The prickly pear cactus, also known as nopal, is a little-known edible powerhouse that's packed with fiber, calcium and antioxidants. Research shows that it may:



Aid in digestion and satiety



Lower cholesterol and help maintain healthy blood sugar levels



Reduce inflammation and help relieve joint pain

How to tell if a cactus is ripe

Firm to the touch

Firm cacti are fully ripe — but be wary of prickles when doing the “squeeze” test.

Tear-shaped

The paddles of a ripe prickly pear cactus are usually teardrop-shaped, about the size of your hand. Small, round, wrinkled cacti are no longer ripe.



Pale and green in color

Different types of cacti may vary in color, but ripe nopales cacti are a pale to bright green.

What does cactus taste like?

Fleshy cactus paddles have a subtle flavor — similar to slightly bitter green beans or asparagus.



3-INGREDIENT CACTUS RECIPES

Nopal Cactus Smoothie

Chop the nopal cactus pad in small pieces, making sure there aren't any prickles left on the skin. Cut the pineapple slice into cubes. Blend cactus, pineapple and juice (ice cubes optional) until smooth.



2 cups cactus, chopped

+



1 slice pineapple, cubed

+



1 cup orange juice

Cactus Salad



Clean and trim cactus, taking care to remove the prickly spines. Cut into strips and boil for 10 to 15 minutes. While cactus is boiling, dice tomatoes. Remove cactus from heat; rinse with cold water and drain. Add tomato to the cactus and sprinkle with feta cheese.



2 cups cactus, sliced

+



2 tomatoes, diced

+



1/4 cup feta cheese

Cactus Tacos

Cut into thin strips, then saute over high heat until partially blackened. Warm tortillas and fill with cactus, green salsa and other toppings, as desired (tomatoes, jalapeños and cilantro are popular choices).



2 cups cactus, sliced

+



1/4 cup green salsa

+



3 tortillas

From the expert

"I love trying new things in the kitchen — just ask my family. Since Mexican cuisine is one of my favorites, I figured I'd try cooking nopales myself. It's a great way to make Mexican dishes more authentically delicious."



Ursula Ridens, RDN — registered dietitian at Sharp HealthCare's Outpatient Nutrition Counseling Program