Healthy Recipe of the Month - May 2006
By Nancy Rogers, MS, RD

Desert Treasures
April/May are my favorite months, as spring in Tucson has a subtle beauty all its own. Having lived in the desert all my life, I have a fascination for its wildlife, botany and archeology. I find it great fun to try recipes using native foods that indigenous people of the desert have eaten for centuries.

Now is the season for **cholla buds** and **prickly pear cactus pads**, commonly called **nopales**. These aren't your typical quick-fixes-for-dinner items, but they are tasty, and by trying them, you will expand your appreciation for the creativity and tenacity of the original desert dwellers.

Email me and let me know if you tried the cholla buds or nopales!

Tohono O'odham Cholla Buds (Ciolim)

Picked from Buckthorn cholla cactus in early Spring, these highly unusual buds are part of the tradional O'odham diet. Very high in calcium with blood sugar lowering properties, they are extremely low on the Glycemic index. About the size of a thumb, they can be eaten boiled, roasted or sauteed. Flavor tones range from artichoke to asparagus. Its texture when boiled or reconstituted is similar to okra. (as taken from the website: www.heritagefoodsusa.com/what_we_sell/fruits_grains.html). To view the buckhorn cholla, go to: www.friendsofsaguaro.org/cholla-buckhorn.html

**Cholla Buds, Basic Preparation**
(taken from American Indian Food and Lore by Carolyn Niethammer)
Pick the Buckhorn cholla buds before they open into flowers. Remove stickers by filling 2 saucepans 1/3 full of clean gravel. Add the cholla buds and pour the gravel and buds back and forth 4-5 times, checking to see if most of the spines are removed. Remaining thorns can be removed with a tweezers, or by cutting them off with a knife. Then wash under running water.
Bring a saucepan of water to a boil, then add the cleaned cholla buds and boil 15 minutes or until tender. Drain. Cholla buds can be used as they are in green salads, soups or stews. Buds can be sun dried for later use. To freshen dried buds, soak in water for 3 hours, then boil ½ hour and serve. 25 dry buds (50g) yield 53 calories, 2g protein, 365 mg calcium, and 11 g carbohydrate

Nopales (Prickly Pear Pads)

I have a Burbank Spineless prickly pear in my front yard, and enjoy using the young pads in a variety of recipes.

Nopales are a vegetable made from the young stem segments of prickly pear, carefully peeled to remove the spines. They are particularly common in their native Mexico. Nopales are generally sold fresh or canned, less often dried to prepare nopalitos. They have a light, slightly tart flavor, and a crisp, mucilaginous texture. Nopales are commonly used in Mexican cuisine in dishes such as huevos con nopales (eggs with nopal), or "tacos de nopales". Nopales are also an important ingredient in New Mexican cuisine. Nopales are very rich in insoluble and especially soluble dietary fiber. They are also rich in vitamins (especially vitamin A, vitamin C, and vitamin K, but also riboflavin and vitamin B6) and minerals (especially calcium, magnesium, potassium, and manganese, but also iron and copper). (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nopales).

Nopalito salsa to serve over fish

from the chef at Canyon Ranch

Ingredients:

- 1 pound fresh nopales, stickers removed and diced
- ¾ c. diced yellow onion
- 1 Tbsp minced garlic
- 2 cups boiling water
- 1 cup roma tomatoes, diced
- ¼ cup diced red onion
- 1 Tbsp minced jalapeno peppers
- 1 ½ Tbsp fresh chopped cilantro
- 1 ½ Tbsp lime juice
- 1 Tbsp vinegar
- ½ tsp sea salt

Directions:

Cook diced nopales, yellow onion and garlic in boiling water for 15 minutes or until tender. Drain water and cool nopales. Combine nopales with tomato, onion, jalapeno, cilantro, lime
juice, vinegar and salt. Mix well and serve with broiled fish.

100 g. of cooked nopales provides 15 calories, 1 g protein, 5 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber and 9 mg Vitamin C.

Go to: www.nps.gov/coro/pphtml/subplants10.html for more information.

**To prepare your own prickly pear pads (Nopales):**

Using tongs, collect the new young pads, 1" to 3" in diameter. To clean, place on a hard surface and with a small sharp knife, scrape off the stickers. Cut the edges off, since they contain lots of small stickers. Rinse in running water, and examine carefully to be sure all stickers have been removed. Clean the surface thoroughly before "de-stickering" the next pad. Chop or dice the cleaned pads, or cut into strips. Nopales can be added to omelets, stews, stir-frys or soups, or used in salsas.

Many years ago, when I was a Senior in nutrition here at the UofA, I had the pleasure of developing recipes using prickly pear pads for an experimental foods class. I tried using the different varieties of cactus around Tucson. When I would asked people's permission to cut some of their cactus for recipe development, everyone was glad for me to trim their prickly pear. I imagine the same hospitality would hold true today. Happy eating!