



## Prickly Pear

*Opuntia santarita* , *Opuntia engelmannii*.  
Nopal(es), Opuntia, Tuna (the fruits)

### Description:

**Height:** 4-5 ft tall and 6-8 ft wide

**Flowers:** 3 1/2 inches, yellow

**Pads:** 12 inches long, round or oval shaped, green-violet, glochids (tiny hair-like barbed thorns)

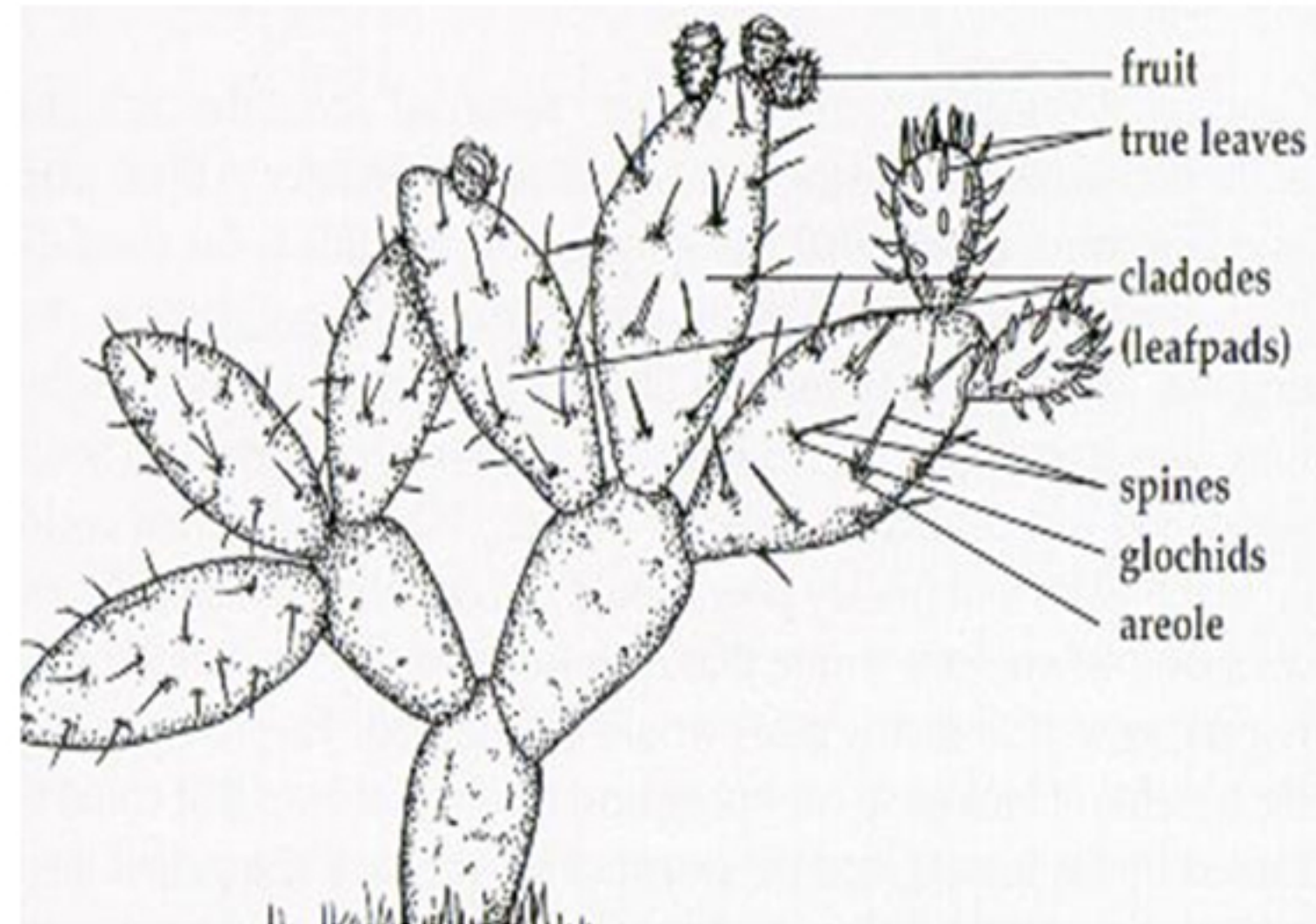
**Fruit:** 2-5 inches tall 1-2 inches wide

**Flowering:** Spring - Summer

**Habitat:** desert, drained soil, full sun

### Uses:

The prickly pear cactus is best known for its multiple uses as food and its medicinal uses. The flesh inside the cactus pads are rich in mucilage and cellulose which produces emollient properties that are used on cuts, abrasions, and bruises to heal them. The cactus has antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties. It can



also be ingested to help treat diabetes, urinary problems, high cholesterol, obesity, and hangovers. For treating diabetes, it can decrease blood sugar levels. For treating hangovers, the cactus extract can lessen the effects of a hangover due to an anti-inflammatory property.

The whole plant can also be eaten as part of a healthy diet. This is because it is high in fiber, antioxidants, and carotenoids. The younger pads are the more commonly eaten pads compared to older pads.

These pads can be boiled or grilled before eating. During the flowering of the pads, the cactus can attract hummingbirds, bees, and lizards. These flowers have antispasmodic and diuretic properties. The fruits that grow on the pads can be eaten as well as used as dye. These fruits can also attract wildlife such as coyotes, tortoises, and bats. The fruit are also made into jams, juices, and candies. The thorns can be made into needles for sewing. Lastly, the prickly pear plant can be used as a natural fence in places like orchards or gardens to keep animals in or out of an area.

### Native Cultures:

The prickly pear can be found throughout almost all of Arizona, mainly the southwest region.



This includes the counties of Cochise, Pima, Coconino, Maricopa, Navajo, Santa Cruz, Yuma, Yavapai, etc. This cactus can also be found in the southwest region of Mexico and the south and central area of Texas. These cactuses have geographic origins in the Sonoran Desert.

### Habitat

The prickly pear survives well in drained soil as in dirt and sand. They can be found growing on flat ground, cliffs, and on mountains. It also grows well when exposed to full sun. They can be found in the desert regions within Arizona, Mexico, New Mexico, and Texas.

### Resources:

Image Resources:

Illustration: Centelles, V. M. (2022, March, 24). Botanical Online. Characteristics of Prickly Pear Cactus. <https://www.botanical-online.com/en/botany/prickly-pear>

Photographs: Elyse Campbell