



# Tucson Community Supported Agriculture

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## Summer 2014

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#### SHISHITO PEPPERS

The shishito pepper is a bright, glossy green and slightly wrinkly pepper that comes to us from Japan. It is finger-long, slender, and thin-walled. Although it turns from green to red upon ripening, it is usually harvested while green. Its name refers to the fact that its tip looks like the head of a lion (shishi), and in Japanese it is often abbreviated as shishitō.

Shishito peppers are mild, with all the flavor of green chiles but without the heat. However, one in twenty peppers is medium hot.

While it is believed that Spanish missionaries brought this chile to Japan, it is also thought that the Japanese had experienced chiles in the 17th century during their trade route journeys to Southeast Asia.

Shishito peppers are most often served cooked. Here are some suggestions:

1. Sauté them in olive oil, over high heat, until they just begin to blister. Serve hot, sprinkled with sea salt, as an appetizer.
2. Deep fry peppers, then slice and mix with slivered seaweed for an appetizer.
3. Pan-fry bacon, toss in whole peppers and finish with chopped, fresh Thai basil. Serve as an appetizer or side.

Japanese Shishito peppers will keep, refrigerated, for up to two weeks. Like other chiles, Shishito peppers are rich in beta-carotene (vitamin A precursor). They are also an excellent source of vitamin C and B, iron, thiamine, niacin, magnesium and riboflavin.

## PRICKLY PEAR FRUIT HARVESTING AND PROCESSING

Yes, the time of year has come for this annual magenta excitement! Processing prickly pear fruit into juice is easy once you know how to do it, and it is incredibly rewarding. The juice, usually with additional sweetening, can be added to refreshing lemonades, margaritas and martinis, and it can be turned into jellies, sorbets, sloshies, paletas (popsicles) and raspados (shaved ice snowcones).

The following is from the Desert Harvesters' website ([www.DesertHarvesters.org](http://www.DesertHarvesters.org)):

**HARVEST FRUIT:** Look for Prickly Pear fruits, or *tunas*, as they're called in Spanish, that are dark red or purple in color. August and September tend to be the season in Tucson. Using tongs, simply pluck the fruit from the *nopal* pad. They should come off easily. The fine hairs on the surfaces of both the fruit and the pads are called glochids—they stick and prick, so you might consider wearing gloves as well. Though the cactus is abundant, be sure to leave ample fruit for wildlife and new cactus generation.

**PROCESS FRUIT:** To process, first wash the fruit by placing it in a sink full of cool water and swishing it around with a large spoon. Then place whole fruits, glochids and all, into a blender or food processor. Blend to make a slurry. Strain the slurry through a pillow case, fine mesh strainer or a colander lined with cloth. We recommend using a clean, old t-shirt or pillow case rather than cheese cloth. Use a spoon to press the juice from the seeds and skins. Let the strained juice settle. Gently pour the juice off the top, leaving most of the sediment behind. Freeze prickly pear juice in ice cube trays then transfer to airtight freezer storage bags. Pour the seeds out in the yard to start a new prickly pear patch.

Alternatively, you can put whole Prickly Pear fruits in the freezer. To thaw and process later, line a colander with a clean pillowcase or t-shirt and place over a bucket or large bowl. Place frozen fruits in the colander and allow to defrost (2-5 hours). Press on fruits with a wooden spoon as they soften to push juice through.

**DRINK FRUIT JUICE:** Prickly Pear fruit is a deliciously refreshing fruit celebrated for its vibrant magenta color, its unique flavor, and its cooling properties. Prickly Pear juice can be diluted with water or added to lemonade or other drinks to make a refreshing beverage. Or use it to make the regional favorites of syrup (to top pancakes or ice cream, or flavor/color margaritas) or jelly (great on toast)!

**NOTE:** Prickly pear juice is very cooling. Do not consume high quantities of non-diluted raw juice as this is known occasionally to cause chills and body aches. (We recently heard from some folks who had a bad reaction from drinking about a half cup of juice diluted in water.) Drinking a few glasses of lemonade with a splash of prickly pear juice is absolutely fine and will give you the cooling effect you're seeking in the dog days of August and the still-here September summer. Just start with small quantities and increase in small increments to find the amount that is right for you!

### **Greek Style Smothered Okra**

Nora McGinnis, adapted from *The Passionate Vegetarian* by Crescent Dragonwagon

1 tablespoon chopped garlic  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 or 2 baskets CSA okra, washed well but not cut open in any way  
1 medium to large ripe CSA tomato or 1 canned tomato, chopped  
Salt and pepper to taste  
A few dashes of cayenne (optional)  
1/2 to 1 teaspoon dried dill

Place a heavy, large skillet or saucepan with a tight fitting lid over low heat. Add the garlic, olive oil, and okra. Cook uncovered for 10 minutes. Do not stir. Add tomatoes. Cover and cook for 30 minutes more. Do not stir, but make sure the heat is low enough so nothing burns. Uncover, stir cautiously, just a few times. The okra should be quite tender, soft and almost golden brown. Be careful not to break the pods open, although a few may have split by now. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with cayenne and dill if desired. Stir once more and serve.

### **Okra Chilaquiles**

Sara Jones, Tucson CSA

This dish is great for breakfast. Served with refried beans and fried eggs, it is also hearty enough for a dinner. I like it dry with the tortillas crunchy, but you can douse this dish in red or green enchilada sauce to make a more authentic chilaquiles recipe.

(Note: always process okra dry! You may wash it but make sure to dry it before chopping it, or it will get slimy).

1 basket okra, chopped and stems removed  
1/2 green chile, diced  
1/2 bell pepper, chopped  
1 small yellow onion, chopped  
6 corn tortillas, sliced into 2 inch long pieces  
2 tablespoon oil  
Salt and pepper to taste

Unless you have a very large skillet, you may want to do this recipe in two batches to make sure that all the tortillas get a bit crispy. Heat oil over medium high heat in a cast iron skillet. Add onions and sauté for a few minutes until beginning to brown, add tortillas and stir to coat with oil. Cook for about 4 minutes to allow tortillas to begin to crisp before adding the vegetables. Stir in the remaining vegetables and reduce heat to medium. Cook for a while longer, stirring occasionally, until tortillas are mostly crunchy and vegetables begin to brown. Add salt and pepper to taste. If desired, add 1 cup of enchilada sauce to the pan and cook for an additional 3 to 4 minutes.

### **Agua Fresca de Sandia (Watermelon drink)**

Philippe, Tucson CSA

1/4 watermelon  
1/4 cup mint leaves (optional)  
2 cups water  
Juice from 2 limes (or lemon)  
1 cup simple syrup (2 tablespoons sugar dissolved in 1 cup of water)

Note: instead of fresh lime juice and simple syrup, you can use 1/4 cup frozen limeade concentrate (such as Minute Maid) dissolved in 1 cup of water. Remove rind and cut watermelon flesh into cubes. Place watermelon cubes and mint in a blender with 2 cups of water and blend until the seeds have broken down. Slowly pour the obtained juice into a pitcher, through a strainer. Add lime juice, simple syrup, and stir. Chill in the refrigerator for 1 hour before serving in glasses with some ice cubes. Note: the pulp will separate and sink to the bottom; that's ok, most people prefer to drink the clear liquid only. Must be consumed within 12 hours (it loses its flavor after that).

### **Sesame Shishito Peppers-new**

These are great simply sautéed in olive oil until slightly charred all over. Here they are just a touch more dressed up. This should only take about 5-6 minutes, just enough time to get the peppers blistered and taking on a nice roasted flavor. Eat these as an appetizer as is. Or you can serve them together with tuna, sardines or anchovies on toast, crackers or rice.

1 basket whole shishito peppers, cleaned and dried  
2 teaspoons oil  
1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil  
1 teaspoon grated or finely chopped fresh ginger  
1 teaspoon soy sauce  
1 tablespoon sesame seeds

Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a skillet over medium high to high heat. Add peppers and toss gently to coat in oil. Let sit for a couple minutes until starting to blister on bottoms. Meanwhile, mix together sesame oil, ginger and soy sauce. Stir and shake peppers, let sit over heat an additional couple minutes, then add liquid and toss to coat. Remove from heat and serve as is, or pinch off stems and serve over rice or toast.

