

# How to Clean and Slice Paddle Cacti (*Nopales*)



Opuntia is the genus of the *Cactaceae* family that includes numerous species of paddle cacti. The most cultivated species for human consumption is *O. ficus-indica*, commonly known as *nopal*, paddle cactus or prickly pear, for its characteristic edible oval fruit.

Choose bright green paddles with no brown spots; they should feel firm, not too wobbly. The prickly spots should look fresh, not wilted. Handle with gardening gloves, and line the working surface with a garbage bag.

Work with one paddle at a time, holding firmly with one gloved hand.

Slice the stem end off with a paring knife (photo, right) and continue trimming all around the edge (photo, far right):



Starting at the stem end, remove the needles on either side of the paddle by placing a vegetable peeler, or the tip of a paring knife, parallel to the surface and scrapping just under the base of the needle, as shown in the photos below, left with a vegetable peeler, and centre with a paring knife. Start at the stem end, moving towards the other tip (photo below, right):



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Remove needles from the other side, then repeat with the rest of the paddles.

In the end, the paddles are clean, and the trimmings are well contained on the plastic bag.

Transfer paddles to a colander and rinse under running water.

Wrap trimmings with plastic bag and discard.



Dry paddles by patting with paper towels. To slice, cut into long strips lengthwise, then across, into pieces about one inch long:



Raw and cleaned paddles and strips start losing moisture and shrivelling almost right away, so use promptly; they may be kept in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for just a couple of days.

For cooking techniques, see next page.



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## How to Cook with Paddle Cacti (*Nopales*)

Place cactus strips in a dry frying pan (photo below, left); cook over medium heat, for one minute, stirring; reduce heat to low, cover the pan and cook for ten more minutes. Uncover; juices from the cactus will have become slimy, this is normal (photo below, centre). Increase heat a little, and continue cooking, stirring, until all the slime has evaporated (photo below, right):



Cooked strips may be added to salads, fried with onions, or cooked with eggs, in stews, soups, etc.

Smoothies made with orange juice and raw *nopales* are popular as part of a diabetes-friendly diet. Cucumber slices are sometimes added (as shown), or other fruits, such as pineapple.



Whole paddles may be grilled along with cheese slices; to serve, top paddles with grilled cheese.

