



HOW TO MAKE SAGUARO CACTUS FRUIT CANDY ROLL-UPS

By Thomas Wiewandt/June2021

When saguaro cactus fruit ripen shortly before summer monsoon storms arrive in the Sonoran Desert, wildlife have a feast. Some Native Americans, most notably the Tohono O'odham, have

traditionally joined this feast (see <https://tohonochul.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/SDT-Saguaro-fruit.pdf>).

I love collecting the sticky seed masses that have fallen, get stuck on a tree or shrub, and begin to dry in the summer heat. It's like eating candy! So last summer (2021), when we had a bumper crop in Tucson, Arizona, I decided to harvest some fruit to make my own cactus candy. Here's the recipe that I came up with.

Tools: harvest pole, bucket, and an old sheet or tarp. A friend suggested that I buy a telescoping pole used by house painters + a screw-on 4" roller attachment. Remove the roller, and you've got a perfect hook for pulling saguaro fruit off the plant. Spread an old sheet or tarp on the ground to keep the fruit clean.

Harvesting 40 fruits >> 1 pint of puree

Remove the loose, juicy mass of seeds+pulp from fruit, but don't scrape the inside of the fruit—it's bitter.

Mash & mix in a bowl. Yellow or pink fruits that haven't split open can be cut open—their seeds/pulp mass will be red but not sweet. I had several of them in my mixture, so I added 3 tablespoons of maple syrup to sweeten it a bit.

Spread this gooey mixture on a parchment paper-lined cookie sheet or tray (you might want to rub a little oil on the parchment paper first).

Dry in the oven for 7 hours at 170 degrees. Leaving the oven door closed, I let it cool in the oven overnight.

Refrigerate: Put the tray in the refrigerator for a few hours

Remove from the fridge and loosen the seed mixture from the paper – it should be somewhat sticky and chewy, not crispy.

You can roll it up and store it in the fridge or freezer in a plastic bag. If frozen, thaw out to soften before serving.

Other uses for this recipe: You should be able to make fruit roll-ups with other kinds of fresh fruit—raspberries, blackberries, or strawberries, for example. Drying times might differ.