

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Desert Harvesters published *Eat Mesquite!: A Cookbook* containing over 80 recipes featuring mesquite, most often as a flour ground from the pods of either native velvet, screwbean, or honey mesquite trees. The project was both a celebration of the desert's abundance and a way to gauge and grow public interest in a single, wild, indigenous food source.

The recipes in that cookbook were culled from over 150 community contributions from people devoted to supporting a local food system, eating healthy, and upholding regional food traditions. We also included some from the out-of-print little cookbook called *Mesquite Meal Recipes* published by the San Pedro Mesquite Company, which graciously gave us permission to reprint whatever we chose.

We viewed mesquite as a “gateway food,” a way of inviting people to see and engage with not only mesquite but also 400 or more other wild foods indigenous to the Sonoran Desert. *Eat Mesquite and More* celebrates this abundance, focusing on mesquite and including 15 additional wild desert foods. It contains some of the recipes from our first cookbook as well as new additions solicited from community members and vetted by a team of volunteer cooks and reviewers.

This cookbook is a community affair, more of a potluck than a fancy banquet. All of the recipes are a little different in style and approach. While our volunteers tested and tasted as many as possible, our process was not quite as exact as that of a *Cook's Illustrated* test kitchen. Still, we worked to make the written entries as consistent as possible, while maintaining the individual flavor and personality of the contributors.

We encourage you to practice with the recipes—especially before throwing a dinner party—to gain confidence in what works best for your kitchen and equipment. We also encourage a spirit of playfulness and experimentation so you can innovate new flavors and make substitutions as needed.

The cookbook includes a “Meet the Ingredient” introduction to each food to help you identify, understand, and appreciate the food source more deeply. Written by seasoned desert harvester Jill Lorenzini with help from other harvesters, these introductions include basic information on seasonality, harvesting, nutrition, planting, and more. We hope you develop your own relationship with each of these foods, understanding them within the context of the desert ecosystem as well as that of your backyard and kitchen. Jill also created the beautiful black-and-white icons identifying each food.

While many of these foods have long been part of Southwest culinary practices, much of that heritage has not been codified in writing but passed along via story and demonstration. We celebrate that intangible heritage in the stories that accompany each section of the cookbook about notable harvesters from the Sonoran Desert (and beyond). These stories feature people and organizations that have influenced generations of harvesters, use particularly creative culinary approaches, have brought wild foods into their businesses, or are doing important work to share best practices of harvesting and eating desert foods with wide audiences. We hope you find their stories as inspiring as we do!

This book collects just a sampling of flavors and practices. We consider the harvesting, cooking, and sharing of wild food ingredients an ongoing process of discovery and learning. You might discover new combinations of flavors or develop more efficient ways of preparing or harvesting these foods. Submit reviews of the recipes as well as variations, changes, and entirely new recipes to our Recipe Database at DesertHarvesters.org. As you deepen your relationship with the desert, please share what you discover with us and with your neighbors and friends.

See you out there. Or at the dinner table!

- Desert Harvesters

ABOUT DESERT HARVESTERS

Desert Harvesters is a non-profit, grassroots organization in Tucson, Arizona, born of a desire to grow, connect with, and contribute to a more delicious life in the place where we live, work, and play.

Our mission is to promote and enhance the planting, awareness, and use of native wild food sources, which can thrive on harvested rainfall and runoff without the additional irrigation that depletes both groundwater and creeks and rivers. We offer workshops in how to harvest and prepare mesquite and other native foods, hold community events to celebrate local harvests, and plant native food-bearing trees and understory plantings throughout Tucson and beyond. By fostering a reciprocal relationship between native plants and local people, we believe we can strengthen local food security, reconnect people with the ecosystem, and build a more dynamic and sustainable community.

Our effort began in 1996 with an annual tree planting in the Dunbar/Spring neighborhood north of downtown Tucson. Neighbors came together to plant hardy, endemic, food-bearing trees such as desert ironwood, velvet mesquite, and foothills palo verde, as well as diverse understory plantings. Over the next decade, we created a resilient neighborhood forest—one that could double as a living pantry, a pharmacy, a flood control system, a natural air conditioner, a habitat for native wildlife, and an auditorium of native bird song.

We learned to “plant the rain,” in deep, mulched basins. From indigenous teachers with long traditions of reciprocity with desert foods, we learned how to harvest and prepare what the plants provided. We learned how to mill mesquite pods into tasty and nutritious flour and eventually bought a Meadows Mills #5 hammermill with a grant from an organization called PRO Neighborhoods.

We held our first public milling in 2003 where we milled pods from neighborhood trees into flour to make mesquite pancakes with prickly pear syrup. Our goal was to show people the whole system, inspiring them to spread the ideas and practices. By 2013, we needed three hammermills to keep up with all the milling. That year we served over 1,500 pancakes in our community garden/food forest against a backdrop of live music and wild food demonstrations. We held community bake sales and “tasting parties” giving people a chance to experiment and innovate. And in 2011, we created *Eat Mesquite!: A Cookbook*, drawing on the culinary traditions and innovation in our community to share the secrets of mesquite with a wider audience.

Over the years, we’ve expanded our offerings. We now offer near-monthly introductory wild food demonstrations and hands-on harvesting and processing workshops as well as our annual mesquite millings through a partnership with the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona and its Santa Cruz River Farmers’ Market and Las Milpitas Farm. We collaborate with Neighborhood Foresters to continue planting and caring for native wild food forests at home, along our streets, and in schoolyards and parks. We consult with local restaurants, breweries, and bars, helping them introduce seasonal local wild foods and drinks throughout the year. We encourage growing native foods on-site, irrigated solely with free rainwater, greywater, and condensate when possible. We work to build on the many traditions and efforts that resulted in Tucson being named the first UNESCO World City of Gastronomy in the United States in 2015.

At Desert Harvesters, our idea of fun is spending time planting and harvesting desert foods, preparing that food into beautiful meals, and sharing it in community with others. We’d love to have you at our table. Join us at DesertHarvesters.org.

PLANTING, HARVESTING, PROCESSING, AND ENJOYING LOCAL ABUNDANCE



1a. Planting rain in newly installed neighborhood traffic circle Photo: Brad Lancaster

1b. Planting wild food plants in traffic circle Photo: Brad Lancaster

1c. Harvesting from now-grown wild food plants in traffic circle Photo: Brad Lancaster

2. Barrel cactus flowers and buds Photo: Jill Lorenzini

3. Green foothills palo verde seed pods Photo: Jill Lorenzini

4. Processing ironwood pods and seeds Photo: Jill Lorenzini

*5. Prickly Pear Wine, Acorn Saguaro Seed Bread, wild and garden greens salad,
palo verde and chuparosa blossom garnishes* Photo: Christian Timmerman

