

Native Fruits, Veggies and Proteins

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12 Native Vegetables

These are native or traditionally cultivated by Indigenous peoples in the Southwest.

- **Cholla buds (*Cylindropuntia* spp.)** – High in calcium and fiber; gathered in spring and boiled or dried.
- **Nopales (prickly pear cactus pads)** – High in antioxidants and fiber; great grilled or sautéed.
- **Amaranth greens (Quelites / Bledo)** – Wild greens eaten fresh or cooked, rich in iron and minerals.
- **Wild spinach (Lamb's quarters / quelites)** – Used in stews and sautés; very nutrient-dense.
- **Tohono O'odham squash (Ha:l)** – Traditional desert-adapted squash with high beta-carotene.
- **Mesquite pods (*Prosopis* spp.)** – Ground into meal, naturally sweet, alkaline, and nutritious.
- **Hopi black beans** – Traditional bean grown by Hopi people, often grown with corn and squash.
- **Desert onion (*Allium* spp.)** – Wild onion used for seasoning and medicinal tea.
- **Yucca root and flowers (*Yucca baccata*)** – Roots cooked like potatoes, flowers sautéed or eaten raw.
- **Devil's Claw greens (*Proboscidea* spp.)** – Young pods and greens cooked traditionally.
- **Chiltepin peppers (*Capsicum annuum* var. *glabriusculum*)** – Native wild chile; tiny, spicy, and nutrient-dense.
- **Wild Purslane (*Verdolagas*)** – Tart, juicy green high in omega-3s and minerals.



12 Native Fruits

Fruit from the desert, highlands, and drylands of the region:

- **Prickly pear fruit (Tunas)** – Sweet, antioxidant-rich fruit of the nopal cactus.
- **Saguaro cactus fruit (Bahidaj)** – Sacred to the Tohono O'odham; used in ceremonies and jams.
- **Mesquite bean pods (used as sweet fruit)** – Sweet, used fresh or dried; made into syrup or meal.
- **Jujube (*Ziziphus jujuba*)** – Ancient desert-adapted fruit that tastes like dates/apples when dried.
- **Manzanita berries** – Used for drinks and snacks by California tribes.
- **Wolfberries / Goji berries (*Lycium* spp.)** – Native varieties grow wild and are rich in vitamins.
- **Hackberry (*Celtis* spp.)** – Sweet berries with protein and carbs; eaten dried or crushed.
- **Desert mulberries** – Wild or cultivated; sweet and packed with antioxidants.
- **Desert fig (*Ficus* spp.)** – Naturalized fig trees thrive in arid environments.
- **Chokecherry** – Traditional fruit for jellies and dried snacks.
- **Coyote melon (*Cucurbita palmata*)** – Though not sweet, used medicinally and symbolically.
- **Pinyon pine nuts** – Technically a seed, but eaten like fruit and prized by many tribes.



6 Native Grains (and Ancient Seeds)

These are mostly gluten-free, high-protein, and ancestral:

- **Amaranth (*Huautli*)** – Sacred grain used by Aztecs and Southwest tribes; high in protein.
- **Chia seeds (*Salvia hispanica*)** – Native to Mexico and Southwest; high in omega-3s.
- **Tepary beans (*Bafv*)** – A drought-tolerant superfood bean from the Sonoran Desert.
- **Blue corn (Hopi maize, Yoeme maize)** – Sacred and highly nutritious; used in atole, tamales, etc.
- **Mesquite meal** – Ground from pods; naturally sweet and used like flour.
- **Quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*)** – While native to the Andes, wild chenopodium species were used by Southwest tribes as well.

12 Plant-Based Proteins

Sourced from native and Indigenous plants with high protein content:

- **Tepary beans (White, brown, black)** – Resilient, high-protein bean with deep cultural roots.
- **Hopi black beans** – Another regional staple full of fiber and plant protein.
- **Mesquite pod flour** – Contains protein and amino acids, especially lysine.
- **Chia seeds** – Complete protein with omega-3s and fiber.
- **Amaranth grain** – Complete protein, often used as porridge or in flatbreads.
- **Pumpkin seeds (Pepitas)** – Traditional protein source, roasted and eaten as a snack or meal addition.
- **Pinyon pine nuts** – Rich in protein, healthy fats, and minerals.
- **Wild sunflower seeds** – Used by many Southwest tribes for protein and oil.
- **Nopales (Cactus pads)** – Provide amino acids and fiber.
- **Yucca flowers and root** – Starchy but can be cooked for fiber and nutrients.
- **Wild legumes (Desert lupines, native peas)** – Some varieties were collected for protein.
- **Devil's claw seeds** – Used by some tribes as a survival food when toasted or ground.



How to Use These in Your Diet

- Make **bowls** with cooked tepary beans, nopales, wild greens, and blue corn flatbread.
- Blend **chia** and **amaranth** into smoothies or hot drinks like traditional *atole*.
- Enjoy **mesquite flour** in cookies, pancakes, or as a thickener in shakes.
- Roast **pumpkin seeds** or **pinyon nuts** for snacks.
- Use **prickly pear fruit**, **goji berries**, and **figs** for naturally sweet treats or teas.