

Friends of PINNACLE PEAK PARK Newsletter

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park • PMB 288, 8711 E. Pinnacle Peak Road • Scottsdale AZ 85255 • www.pinnaclepeakpark.com

Prickly Pear Cactus

By Greg Paulsen

The prickly pear cactus is a familiar sight to visitors and residents of the Sonoran Desert. It is almost impossible to drive through the City of Scottsdale without seeing these hardy desert plants in road medians, front and back yards, and other landscaped areas. Go ahead and give it a try! If you are not feeling confident in your ability to recognize these cacti, do not worry. Although there are many varieties of prickly pear, all subspecies share distinctive pad shapes, colorful blooms, and abundant fruits that make them easy to identify any time of year.

The Englemann's prickly pear may be the most common variety in the Pinnacle Peak area. Its spiny pads are oval to almost circular, and are green to blue-green in color. Englemann's prickly pears produce flowers that can be yellow, orange, red, or somewhere in between. If the flowers are pollinated, they produce a fruit that is red or purple and covered by glochids (minuscule hairlike, often barbed cactus bristles) that can be quite painful and difficult to remove when embedded in skin.

One of the most common and most easily recognized prickly pears is the beavertail, whose long pads resemble the flat tails of its namesake animal. Beavertails are blue-gray in color and often lack large spines, but are still covered in glochids. Beavertail flowers are pink or magenta in color and give way to a grayish colored fruit that is, unfortunately, also covered in glochids.

The purple prickly pear cactus, which some botanists identify as the Santa Rita Prickly Pear (but others disagree, considering them separate species), has pads that are shaped similarly to the Englemann's but have a distinctive purple hue towards their tips. The amount of purple present in the pads can vary based on precipitation and temperature. The pads themselves have very few spines, but do have glochids. Purple prickly pears produce pale yellow flowers that lead to fruits that are red to purple in color. And you guessed it! They also have glochids on them.



Prickly pear fruits are edible (at least their interior "meat" is – do NOT try to eat the glochid-covered outer rind) and their juice is drinkable. In Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries, the fruit is known as "tuna." It can be used in all sorts of interesting ways; for instance, you can find prickly pear candy in many gift shops, savor a prickly pear margarita at a local resort or cantina, or even enjoy your pancakes with some prickly pear syrup. Prickly pear pads ("nopales" in Spanish) can also be eaten and taste delicious when grilled and topped with chili sauce or salsa, or incorporated into an omelet.

The most common way to consume prickly pear fruits of any variety is by juicing them. Because of the challenges associated with preparing a fruit that is covered in painful pricklers, there are a wide variety of methods people use to prepare them. The following steps represent some of the common elements approaches to preparation.

Use a long pair of kitchen tongs (instead of your bare hands or even gloves) to safely remove the ripe fruits (and avoid all those painful glochids). Place the fruits in a bowl and run them under water, or submerge them in boiling

water. Then place them on a washable cutting surface (never touching the fruit) and cut off both ends of the fruit. Make a vertical cut into the skin, but not all the way through the fruit. Use kitchen tools to peel the skin (and its resident glochids) from the edible interior portion of the fruit. Other suggestions include burning the glochids off of the fruit using an open flame (please be careful if you try this). With the skin removed, you can now safely handle the fruit. The meat of the fruit can be eaten at this point, but beware the seeds inside it. Various methods of dealing with the seeds are available – food processors, juicers, food mills, or good old fashioned elbow grease. Once you have strained out (or blended down) the seeds, you will be left with delicious prickly pear fruit juice that can be enjoyed on its own or mixed with other juices or adult beverages! Classes on prickly pear pad and fruit preparation are offered by several organizations in the area.

If you can believe it, there is only one known prickly pear cactus located along the trail at Pinnacle Peak Park. If you think you know where it is, stop by the office to tell a staff member and win a lovely Pinnacle Peak Park sticker! You can see this cactus right from the trail (so this cannot be used as an excuse to break the rules and go off-trail). All of the plants in the park are unique and should be experienced by all visitors just as they are; this is why all plants in the park are protected. Please do not pick any fruit or flowers (of any plant, not just the prickly pear). Thank you, and happy searching!



Featured Volunteer: Marian Kuzma

By Yvonne Massman

If you need a good dose of peace, love, and happiness, then plan to be at Pinnacle Peak Park on any given Friday between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and noon when Marian Kumza is here volunteering! It is pretty much a guarantee that by spending even a little bit of time in her presence you will leave with one or all of those feelings.

Marian has been a volunteer at Pinnacle Peak Park for a year. She is a retired commercial pilot who flew for Hawaiian Air. Marian has always loved the desert environment and has been a part-time resident off and on since the late 1980's. She and her two beagles, Asta and Lily, took up permanent residence in the north Scottsdale area from Hawaii just over a year ago. She designed and built her dream home when she arrived. This is where she enjoys the sunrises and sunsets from her roof top patio or rustic ramada out in the native desert vegetation, and watching the wildlife activity around her home streaming from her game camera or keeping tabs on "Howie" the resident gopher snake.



Photo by Kathy Mascaro

In just the short amount of time that Marian has lived here she not only became a Pinnacle Peak Park volunteer but also a

steward with the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Conservancy, a trail crew volunteer for the Maricopa County Park system out at Spur Cross, a teen mentor and outdoor activities volunteer in the Salt River Maricopa-Pima Indian community, and she regularly volunteers at her church. This sounds like a full time job!

Marian has currently added training for a Grand Canyon north to south hike to her already full days. She is convinced that her canyon experience is going to be one of the top joyous occasions of her life. In her words: "this is the happiest time of my life being in the beauty of this state and the desert. What else could there be?" How great is that?

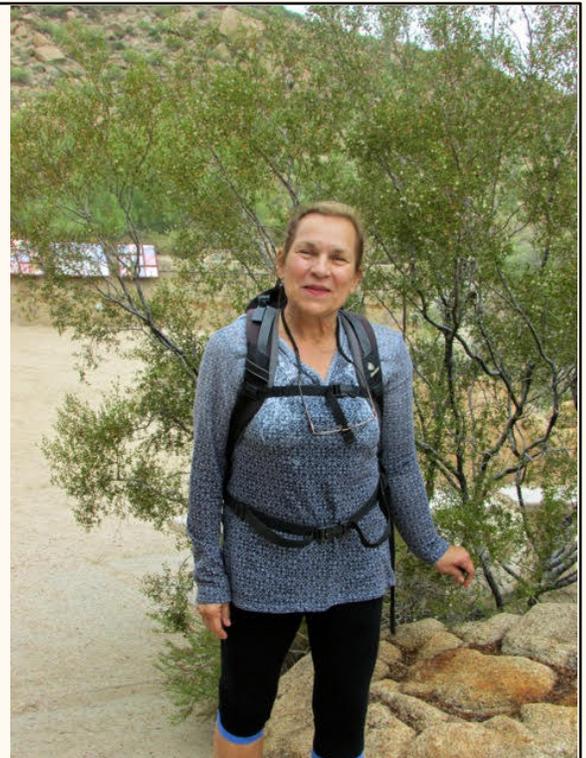


Photo by Kathy Mascaro

Pardon Our (Soon to Be) Dust!

By Yvonne Massman

Within the next few months Pinnacle Peak Park will begin three Capital Improvement projects identified by the board of the Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park, which will enhance the experience of our visitors. These projects consist of a new information kiosk that will be located in the area between the office and ramada, larger poured concrete benches that will be facing the peak, and an expanded storage facility off of the south end of the building.

Phil Weddle, architect of the current structures at Pinnacle Peak Park and partner in Weddle Gilmore black rock studio, is designing these three projects. All funding will be through the Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park, via all of your generous donations, calendar sales, and fund-raisers. This is an exciting time for all of us who appreciate and love Pinnacle Peak. Please stay tuned as we move forward!

Friends Calendar Sales

2016 Calendar Sales for the Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park are underway. This project is helping raise funds for the anticipated improvements at the Park. The calendar depicts the beauty of the Park and provides useful information about the Sonoran Desert. Cost is \$12 per calendar or two for \$20 and are available at the Park.

Scheduled Activities at the Park Oct 2015 - Dec 2016

**10/23/15 6:30PM Wildlife Program:
Biology of Bats**, Join Arizona Game and Fish Biologist Randy Babb for a presentation on the biology of bats, one of the most misunderstood and maligned animals on the planet. Learn about the important role these fascinating creatures play in our everyday lives and get a glimpse into their secretive lives and some of their fascinating adaptations for survival.

10/27/15 6PM Full Moon Hike

11/13/15 6PM Astronomy Night

11/21/15 10AM-12PM Liberty Wildlife

12/05/15 Jingle Hike to Santa

12/11/15 5:45PM Astronomy Night

01/09/16 6PM Astronomy Night

**01/22/16 6:30PM Wildlife Program:
Biology of Javelina**, though Javelina are common residents of Arizona, they are shrouded in misconceptions. Some people think they are rodents, others presume they are a type of wild pig. In reality they are neither, but rather members of the peccary family, a group of hoofed mammals related to pigs and unique to the New World. Learn about the natural history of these fascinating Arizona icons and of their recent immigration from the tropics. We will discuss their distinguishing features, habitats, habits and history of these amazing creatures.

01/23/16 6PM Full Moon Hike

02/06/16 6:30PM Astronomy Night

**02/19/16 6:30PM Wildlife Program:
Venomous Animals of Arizona**, Arizona is home to more species of venomous creatures than any other state. We have 14 species of rattlesnakes, over 60 species of scorpions and who knows how many species of spiders living in our state. In fact one mountain range near Phoenix has more species of venomous reptiles than the entire U.S. east of the Mississippi River. Learn about these amazing animals and the real threat they present to you in an evening program with Arizona Game and Fish Department biologist Randy Babb. Live animals will be used to augment the presentation.

02/22/16 6:30PM Full Moon Hike

03/04/16 6PM Astronomy Night

**03/11/16 6:30PM Wildlife Program:
Snakes of Arizona**, Arizona is famous for its rich diversity of interesting and unique reptiles. Many of these are found nowhere else in the United States. Snakes are not the least among these. Our own Sonoran Desert is a focal point for snake diversity. In this presentation, you will learn about some of Arizona's more singular snakes along with those species that inhabit the Sonoran Desert. We will discuss the role these serpents play in the overall ecological picture and how they are vital to our desert ecosystem. Learn about their habitat, feeding habits and life history and improve your chances of spotting one of these fascinating creatures.

**03/20/16 10AM-12PM Southwest
Wildlife**

03/23/16 6:45PM Full Moon Hike

04/09/16 7:15PM Astronomy Night

04/16/16 10AM-12PM Liberty Wildlife

04/21/16 7:15PM Full Moon Hike

05/06/16 7:45PM Astronomy Night

**05/14/16 10AM-12PM Phoenix
Herpetological Society**

Scheduled Activities at the Park, Continued

05/21/16 7:45PM Full Moon Hike
06/20/16 8PM Full Moon Hike
07/19/16 7:45PM Full Moon Hike
08/18/16 7:15PM Full Moon Hike
09/16/16 6:45PM Full Moon Hike
09/30/16 6:45PM Astronomy Night
10/15/16 6PM Full Moon Hike
10/29/16 6PM Astronomy Night
11/14/16 5:45PM Full Moon Hike
12/02/16 5:45PM Astronomy Night
12/13/16 5:30PM Full Moon Hike
12/30/16 6PM Astronomy Night

*Reservations are required a week ahead of all events except the Liberty Wildlife and Southwest Wildlife Events, please contact the park. Astronomy Nights have a minimum age of 8 to attend. Please call the Park's main number at 480-312-0990 for more information, or to make your reservation. Pinnacle Peak Park is located at 26802 N. 102nd Way, Scottsdale 85262.



**This Newsletter is published by
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