

Growing Prickly Pear from Pads

“Prickly pear cacti (*Opuntia* spp.) are easily identified by their upside-down pear-shaped pads or segments. There are more than 150 varieties of prickly pear cacti, all of which are hardy in Sunset's Climate Zones 12 through 24. These drought-tolerant plants make very low-maintenance houseplants that add a bit of Southwestern flair to a room's decor. Prickly pear cacti are easily propagated through cuttings.

- 1) **BEFORE taking cactus out of the box put on heavy work gloves/leather gloves (not fabric) to protect your hands from injury while working with the cactus.** Do NOT handle pads in the wind as small spines can be loose and blow on you. It is also helpful to use kitchen tongs to handle the pads but be gentle not to damage the pad's skin with them.
- 2) Place the cutting on a flat surface in filtered sunlight. Choose a dry room that has constant temperatures of 60 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Leave the cutting for seven to 10 days to form callus tissue over the cut edge. (Cuttings were shipped freshly cut, not callused.)
- 3) Use cactus soil from your local nursery, Home Depot. Or you can mix one part perlite with one part compost to create a well-draining growing medium to plant the cactus in. Fill a container with the mixture, leaving the top 1 to 2 inches empty. Use a container with drainage holes in its bottom.
- 4) Set the cactus cutting with the callused/cut edge resting on the soil in the center of the pot. Push one-third of the cutting into the soil mixture (cut end down). You don't want to bury your cutting too deep but it needs to be able to stand up. Tamp the soil down around the base of the cactus until the cutting is able to stand upright on its own.
- 5) Water the planted cutting using a watering can until the soil is evenly moist. Place the pot in a warm room -- 60 degrees Fahrenheit or warmer -- in filtered sunlight. Water the cactus when the top inch of soil begins to dry out. **SOIL MUST DRY OUT COMPLETELY BETWEEN WATERINGS OR YOU CAN ROT YOUR CACTUS PAD.**
- 6) Once the cactus becomes established and begins to produce new growth decrease supplemental watering to wetting just the top 1/4 inch of soil every seven days. Follow this water regimen during the months when nighttime temperatures remain above 60 degrees Fahrenheit. If nighttime temperatures are below 60 degrees Fahrenheit then only water every 14 days. Once your cactus pad is fully rooted you can water the soil more deeply but remember **ALLOW SOIL TO DRY OUT BETWEEN WATERINGS. You can kill/rot your cactus with too much water.**
- 7) Move the cactus to full sunlight indoors once it begins producing new growth to begin acclimating it to brighter light. Move the cactus to full sunlight outdoors after two weeks if you eventually plan to plant the cactus outdoors in the ground. Be careful not to sunburn your cactus. They prefer bright but filtered light and to gradually adjust to full sunlight.
- 8) Grow the cactus in the container for at least one year. Transplant the cactus plant in the spring once soil temperatures reach 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Plant the cactus in an area that receives full sunlight and contains well-draining soil. Dig a hole equal in depth and twice as wide as the plant's root ball. Place the root ball in the center of the hole. Backfill the hole with soil and tamp it down firmly. Water the cactus immediately after planting. It is best to protect even adult plants from frost. You can also leave your cactus in a container and during freezing weather move it to a greenhouse or warmer location that still has bright light.

Tip

- Prickly pear cacti do not require fertilization.

Warning

- Plant prickly pear cactus away from high-traffic areas in the landscape to avoid injury. **Keep these plants away from pets and small children.**

Adapted from: <http://homeguides.sfgate.com/grow-cutting-prickly-pear-cactus-25018.html>