



Photo: by Glenn Vargas of the California Academy of Sciences

Common Name: Prickly Pear  
Scientific Name: *Opuntia Occidentalis*  
Kumeyaay Name: Melltat

Description: Prickly Pear is a kind of cactus that has flat (like fat pancakes) stems that are all attached together. It has very long, sharp, needles. It has yellow or pink flowers that bloom in the early spring. It also has a fruit called tunas that is purple when it is ready to eat.

The Kumeyaay used this plant: They ate the fruit of this cactus raw. Or they actually would fry or boil the green pads to eat. Sometimes they used the needles for tattooing (From *Delfina Cuero* by Florence Shipek, Ballena Press, Menlo Park, CA, 1991)

You can read about this plant in *Indians of the Oaks* (Secrets of the Trail) on pages: 138 and 241.

In the book, the herbwoman was hunting for the fruit that grows on the Prickly Pear cactus for food.

By Mackenzie