

## Mesquite

Mesquite (*Prosopis* sp.) was a traditional staple among indigenous peoples of the southwestern deserts. The 6 to 8 inch pods are high in protein, carbohydrates, fiber and minerals. Trees often produce prolifically. Although mesquite meal is naturally sweet it is extremely effective in controlling blood sugar levels in people with diabetes.

### *Harvesting Mesquite Pods*

Mesquite pods are ready to harvest when they are brittle, the seeds inside rattle and they come off the tree easily. It takes some vigilance to keep track of them, as they fall off easily when they are ripe. Hard pulling indicates that pods are unripe. Avoid pods that appear to have fungal growth on the outside. Once they are on the ground, they are no longer usable because of mold. Ripe pods are usually tan to red in color, often mottled. The pods may ripen anytime over the summer depending on conditions and there is usually a second bloom, so they can be picked June through October.

### *Drying Mesquite Pods*

Pods are easily cleaned by dunking them in a pail of water and swishing them around. Place them in the sun for several days to dry thoroughly until they are brittle. The pods are dry when they snap in two immediately rather than bending. Pods can be dried on baking sheets or trays. For large quantities place pods on hardware cloth wire mesh over sheets of tin roofing.

### *Storing Mesquite Pods*

Pods can be stored in several ways. Some people put them in the freezer to completely prevent insects from hatching out. For large quantities store them in plastic garbage cans or containers with tight lids. A few days before the milling, lift pods out away from any bugs collected at the bottom, and place them in the sun for their final drying. Pods must be ABSOLUTELY BRITTLE DRY when they are brought for milling.

### *Milling Mesquite Pods*

Mesquite meal was traditionally ground with stone implements. Modern mills make the work much easier. Best are hammer mills that use “hammers” to pulverize the entire pods into flour. The pods are high in sugar so they will quickly gum up grinding type mills and shorten the life of home blenders. Millings are scheduled in the dry months after the high dew point of the summer monsoon rainy season since dry mesquite pods will uptake some of the atmospheric moisture. The pods must be **totally free of dirt, debris, and especially small stones**, that can severely damage the screen in the hammermill. Five gallons of mesquite pods make one gallon of meal.

More information at: [www.omick.net](http://www.omick.net) under the Native Desert Foods section  
And [www.desertharvesters.org](http://www.desertharvesters.org) - to rent hammermills & more milling dates

**2007 Milling Dates:** Oct. 20, 8 to noon - Bisbee Farmers Market - Free milling & mesquite pancake breakfast. Donations appreciated. Call 378-2973 for more information.  
Nov. 10, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. - Cascabel Milling & Mesquite Pancake & Waffle Breakfast –  
Cascabel Community Center. Contact [cascabelhermitage@yahoo.com](mailto:cascabelhermitage@yahoo.com) or [david@omick.com](mailto:david@omick.com).  
*Desert Heritage Foods Program - Baja Arizona Sustainable Agriculture – May 2007*