

Saguaro fruit was a summer feast

For generations, the Tohono O'odham used saguaro fruit to make a variety of foods that were especially important in the summer weeks before newly planted fields began to yield crops. Saguaro syrup and pulp were used to make jam and candy and added to bread to make it sweet. Saguaro seeds were added to porridge, ground for flour, mixed with syrup for a sweet snack, and fed to chickens.

Traditionally, the Tohono O'odham moved from their winter homes to saguaro camps before continuing on to their summer villages. For weeks, they lived among the saguaros, harvesting fruit from the giant *hasañ* early in the day. When the sun grew hot, the harvesting work stopped and the preservation process began.

Summer heat spoils saguaro fruit very quickly, so each day's harvest was processed immediately. The pulp was soaked in water for several hours, and then boiled to make syrup. Pulp strained from the syrup and dried in the sun was beaten to loosen the seeds, which were parched and stored. After a second day in the sun, the seed-free pulp was ready for storage, too.



Saguaro camp is a time for family and friends

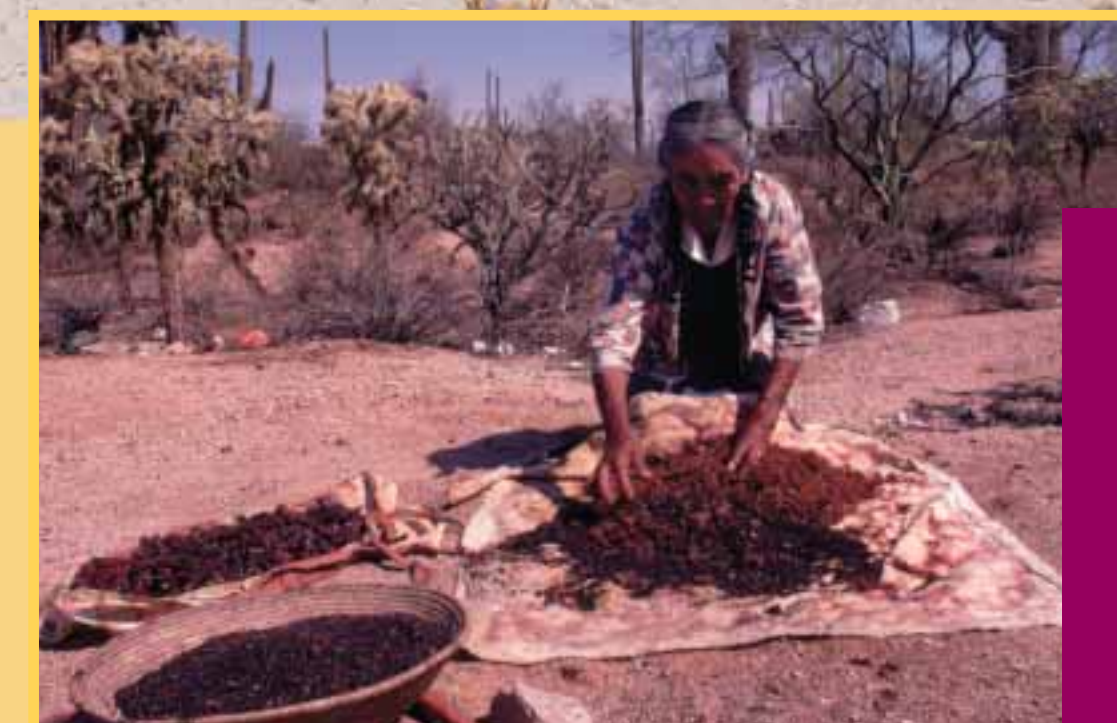
Year after year Tohono O'odham families returned to the same sites—each family had a camp in an area where saguaros were plentiful. Some Tohono O'odham families still spend several days or weeks in saguaro camps, while others go on weekends, as their work schedules permit. Just as their ancestors did, they build ramadas (*watto*) for shade, using mesquite or palo verde for framing and ocotillo, brush, or saguaro ribs for roofing. They may also use modern materials such as lumber and tarpaper. Ramadas may shelter tables and chairs for socializing because saguaro camp is a time for visiting with family and friends, as well as a time of hard work.



Historically, pulp-straining baskets were made of sotol fibers. Today, saguaro harvesters may use wire screens or cloth sacks stretched between two sticks.



Saguaro fruit syrup (*bahidaj sitol*) plays a key role in the sacred wine ceremony that hastens summer rains.



After a second day in the sun, the seed-free pulp is ready for storage too.

It takes 20 to 30 pounds (9 to 13.5 kg) of saguaro fruit to make just one gallon (less than 4 liters) of syrup!