

Artichoke



Historians believe the Artichoke originated in the Mediterranean countries, possible Sicily or Tunisia, where they were first developed into an edible vegetable. In 77 AD the Roman naturalist Pliny called the choke one of earth's monstrosities, but many continued to eat them. Historical accounts show that wealthy Romans enjoyed artichokes preserved in honey and vinegar, seasoned with cumin, so that this treat would be available year round.

Yuma Artichoke production varies from the edible Artichokes to the production of its seed. Acreage is in the range of 500 acres within the county.

From the 16th century to the end of the 20th century, the Artichoke was made a gourmet item in Paris, France. The Artichoke was thought to have been an aphrodisiac during the 16th century, so much so that consumption of the rare vegetable was reserved only for men for it was thought to enhance sexual power.

It was not until the early twentieth century that artichokes were grown in the United States. In the U.S., Artichokes were first grown in Louisiana brought there by settlers in the 19th century.

The word Artichoke comes from the Arabic word *al-qarshuf*. The name passed into Spanish during the Middle Ages. The Old Spanish word *alcarchofa* was variously modified as it passed through Italian. The name *articiocco* was then modified in English, once introduced to the English.

The Artichoke was introduced to California by the Spanish during the nineteenth century. During this time, many Italian immigrants settled in the coastal city of Half Moon Bay. In the 1950's, Artichokes earned fame in the state of California, thus giving the status of the official vegetable for Monterey County. Today, California provides nearly all of the Artichokes in the United States.

Here's one way to eat artichokes. Pull each leaf off the choke and hold the pointed end between your fingers and drag the leaf between your teeth. Most of the edible portion is on inside bottom as about 1/3 of the choke leaf. Once you've eaten all the leaves you'll see the heart or flower of the choke. Once you see a bed of fuzzy or hair like strands you've hit the heart. Scoop out the fuzz with a spoon and discard. The rest of the base of the choke is edible, referred to as the heart.

Artichokes are the large, unopened flower bud of a plant belonging to the thistle or sunflower family. The many leaf-like parts making up the bud are called scales. Peak season for Yuma grown Artichokes is in late February, through April.

Artichokes are actually a flower bud, and if allowed to flower, blossoms measure up to seven inches in diameter, are a wonderful violet-blue and resemble that of a thistle, its closest relative.

In 1947, Marilyn Monroe was crowned the first Queen of the Artichokes! And, she was crowned in Castroville, California is known as the Artichoke Capital of the World.

Artichokes do not have great nutritive value, but they contain small quantities of many vital vitamins and minerals that are important insofar as they supplement other foods in the diet. Current research is showing benefits to the liver from cynarin, a compound found in the artichoke's leaves. Silymarin is another compound found in artichokes that has powerful antioxidant properties and may help the liver regenerate healthy tissue.

Artichokes provide the important minerals magnesium, chromium, manganese, potassium, phosphorus, iron and calcium. A single artichoke provides 6% of the Recommended Daily Value of phosphorus, 10% of magnesium, 8% of manganese, 10% of chromium, 5% of potassium, 4% of iron and 2% of calcium and iron.

Due to the manner in which whole artichokes must be eaten, they are often served as an appetizer or as a separate course during the meal. Or, they may be stuffed with meat, fish, poultry, or fresh vegetables, and served either hot or chilled as a main dish salad.

Cynar is an Italian artichoke flavored aperitif, a before-dinner liquor that is thought to stimulate the appetite.

The Artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*) is actually a perennial thistle and can grow over 6 feet tall, with arching, deeply lobed, silvery glaucous-green leaves from 2 to 4 feet long. The flowers develop in a large head from an edible bud about 4 to 8 inches in diameter with numerous triangular scales. The edible portion of the buds consist primarily of the fleshy lower portions of the bracts and the base, known as the "heart"; the mass of inedible immature florets in the center of the bud are called the "choke."

When harvesting, Artichokes are cut leaving an inch or two of stem which help in keeping them fresher longer, frequently remaining quite fresh for two weeks or longer under average retail conditions.

Apart from food use, the Artichoke is also an attractive plant for its bright floral display, sometimes grown in herbaceous borders for its bold foliage and large purple flower heads.

Artichokes can also be made into an herbal tea; artichoke tea is produced as a commercial product in the Dalat region of Vietnam.

While Yuma grown Artichokes are grown primarily from seed, the California artichoke can be grown as a perennial.

The height of the Artichoke flower stalk can determine the size of the bud.

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