

Beautiful & delicious

Artichokes bring versatility to any home garden

Question: Can you give me some advice for growing artichokes?

Answer: Artichokes are finding increasing popularity among gardeners. With deeply lobed silver leaves, the artichoke unfolds as much mystery in the garden as it does on the dinner table.

The artichoke is both a nutritious vegetable and a beautiful landscape plant. The artichoke, (*Cynara cardunculus* var. *scolymus*), is a perennial edible plant that is a member of the thistle family, and has been cultivated and enjoyed since the time of the Romans.

Plants can reach 3 feet in height and width and the flowers can be 7 inches in diameter. The artichoke is native to the Mediterranean region.

There are two main types of artichokes – those that are round are known as Globe and those that are long and tapered are known as Violetta. The flowering bud of these artichokes is the part that is harvested.

The large, round globe artichoke, which is the variety most Americans know, has been grown in the United States since the 1920s. The American artichoke industry is concentrated in California's Monterey County. Although most artichokes thrive in the cool, moist climate of coastal California, western Oregon is usually mild enough to grow these edible thistles as perennials.

Artichokes can be grown in containers.

According to folklore, extracts derived from the leaves are the basis of herbal medicines that



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are used for treating the liver, gall bladder and kidneys, reducing high cholesterol, lowering blood pressure and other conditions.

Here are some recommendations for growing healthy artichoke plants:

For the best success, recommended varieties for our area include Green Globe, Imperial Star and Emerald. For something unusual, try growing Violetto. It has great flavor and interesting spiny violet bracts.

Artichokes are best grown in full or partial sun. Space plants 3-5 feet apart. Artichokes require well-drained soil rich in organic matter. Add aged compost to planting beds in advance of planting. Artichokes are most easily grown from bare-root divisions purchased from a nursery. Set divisions in the garden on about the average date of the last frost in spring.

Artichokes also can be grown from seed. To grow artichokes from seed, start them indoors in late February or March under grow lights for about eight weeks and then plant them outside after the last frost. Foliar applications of a liquid fertilizer containing calcium and zinc are recommended every two weeks during active growth in early spring.

Before a hard frost, cut plants to 8-10 inches above the ground and mulch with clean straw



Globe artichokes, as seen here, have been grown in the United States since the 1920s.

to keep the crown from freezing; crown death may occur at 25 degrees F or below. Artichokes require a dormant period each year to trigger a new round of flowering the following year – this usually comes in the cool of winter. Do not water or feed plants during the dormant time.

In the spring, dress the plants with compost and begin watering again; foliage will re-sprout and plants will produce new flower buds. An artichoke will produce well for about three or four years. After that, it's best to dig and divide it as it produces

off-shoot plants that may crowd the original plant.

Artichoke harvest begins in May and continues well until frost. Buds are generally harvested once they reach full size, just before the bracts begin to spread open. Smaller artichokes are the most tender. Leave about 1-1½ inches of stem attached to each bud.

If you miss the ideal artichoke harvest time for Globe and Violetta types and buds are not harvested, they will form a purple flower that can be cut for fresh or dried arrangements.

A common problem you may encounter with

your artichoke plants include aphids. Aphids love them so keep a close eye out. If you see ants, look for aphids and wash them off with a hard spray of water or spray with Neem oil or pyrethrins.

Other problems include powdery mildew, verticillium wilt and botrytis rot, especially during rainy weather. Curly dwarf virus and bacterial crown rot are other artichoke diseases. To reduce the chance of diseases becoming a problem, leave plenty of space between plants and avoid overhead irrigation and water-logged soil.

Used to set off any color in a perennial border, as a striking specimen plant or the flagship of a vegetable garden, the artichoke has much to offer to the gardener. But the reason most people grow them are the leathery leaves made to dip into butter – or is it mayo? – and the succulent heart at the center.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.



Left unharvested, artichoke plants will form a purple flower that can be cut for fresh or dried arrangements.

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