

# GROWING GLOBE ARTICHOKES

**Not only are artichokes the tastiest of thistles, they are also an attractive and vigorous addition to your vegetable patch.**

The globe artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*) belongs to the thistle family. It is also known as the French artichoke and the crown artichoke, but is not related to the Jerusalem artichoke, which is actually a tuber.

The artichoke 'vegetable' is actually the flower head which is picked and eaten before it blooms. Only the heart and the fleshy base of the leaves is edible. The floral parts in the centre and base of the flower (the choke) must be removed before eating.

## Site and soil

Artichokes need a bit of space to grow - a mature plant will end up about 1.5m high and across.

Because the plants are perennial and will stay in the same place in the garden for a number of years, the initial preparation of the soil is important. They prefer an open, sunny spot in the garden, with well-drained soil, improved with decomposed manure or fertiliser.

## Planting

Artichokes can be planted from seed in spring, but it is far easier to plant suckers.

A mature plant typically has a main stem and a number of lateral suckers. Carefully separate the sucker using a spade, trim back any woody leaves or roots and plant in a suitable place in mid-late winter.

## Cultivating

Water plants well until they are established and protect them from water and heat stress when young. Once mature, they are fairly resilient.

Build up mulch in autumn, and cut stems back once the leaves go yellow. Mature plants will appreciate a boost of fertiliser and mulch each spring.

## Harvesting

It is recommended that you remove any flower heads as they form during the first year (generally 4-6 heads), so the young plants have a chance to grow and produce leaves.

From the second year on, pick the artichokes (generally 10-12 heads) once they are swollen, but before the scales have started to open. When harvesting, leave a few centimetres of stem. Buds harvested early in the season tend to be the best quality.

## Problems

The major problem in this region is susceptibility to crown rot. This is unlikely to arise if drainage is good

and the soil has been well prepared.

## Choosing and using

At the markets, choose artichokes that are heavy, fat and tightly closed. Although they can be bought fresh for around half the year, early spring is the best time to buy.

If you're not eating them straight away, cut an inch off the stalk and store in a plastic bag in the crisper - but only for a few days.

Artichokes are usually boiled, sautéed, stuffed or steamed, and young artichokes are delicious raw in salads.

To cook, trim the stem and pull off the lower spiky leaves. Cut and remove the uppermost part of the flower head - lemon juice will stop cut surfaces turning brown.

Boil for up to half an hour, depending on age. Pull the leaves off one by one, dip the base in mayonnaise, hollandaise or melted butter and lemon juice and scrape off the flesh between your teeth.

When you come to it, pull off the central cone in one piece, exposing the choke. Scrape out the choke with a spoon, leaving the delicious heart to cook with.

## References and further reading

- From a la carte to zucchini (Anthony Barker, 1995)
- The Farmers Market Companion (Viking Books)
- Gardening Australia website [www.abc.net.au/gardening](http://www.abc.net.au/gardening)

