



Artichokes

The artichoke is a perennial, so make sure you prepare the soil well before planting. The plants reach a height of 3' - 4' and a spread of up to 6' in diameter, so allow plenty of space for them to grow. The artichoke does best in frost free areas having cool, foggy summers. Freezing temperatures kill the buds and hot dry conditions destroy the tenderness.

Artichokes require frequent irrigation during the growing season being about once a week and more often in warm areas. Moisture deficiency results in loose buds of inferior quality, during the growing season. If the soils are heavy water less.

In the cool coastal areas, two crops per year can be expected. If you live outside the temperate coastal area with hot, dry summer, plant in partial shade.

For preparing and cooking, first twist off the stalk which should also remove some of the fibers at the base and then cut the base flat and pull away any small base leaves. If the leaves are very spiky, trim them with a pair of scissors if liked, then rinse under running water. Cook in boiling water, acidulate with the juice of a half a lemon. Large artichokes need to be simmered for 30 - 40 minutes until tender. To test if they are done, pull off one of the outer leaves. It should come away easily and the base of the leaf should be tender.

For harvesting you want the artichoke to have dark green leaves and pick it before any browning or dryness. The stalk should correspond to the size of the artichoke and be spindly. The artichoke should feel heavy for its size.

Store unwashed artichokes in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 4 days, wash just before cooking. They are best used the day of harvest.

Artichokes contain small amounts of potassium and vitamin A.

We are blessed here in California with our coastal region and its abundant production of artichokes. If you are traveling about, Italy, France, and Spain produce good quality artichokes. They tend to eat the artichokes before the choke has formed and the entire artichoke is edible. You see artichokes here more and more like that at various farmer's markets.