

Description

Globe Artichoke
Cynara Scolymus
Family: *Asteraceae*

Growing Tips

Globe Artichoke is a herb/vegetable related to the thistle family that takes a prominent position in the garden. The leaves start as medium sized ovals but are lightly spiked around the edges and develop into large silvery green pinnate leaves with thistley spikes that stem from the root and spread over around 1.5 square metres. Its flower stems also reach the same height.

Parts Used

Globe Artichoke likes full sun but must be protected from the wind and prefers moisture-retentive, humus-rich soil with plenty of sun. Although they are perennial, it is advised to add a new plant each year as they produce the best fruit in year two and three. To get the best results plant out in mid spring, at least 50cm apart and mulch the soil during summer to keep moist. Also water regularly. Be careful though as it can be prone to septoria leaf spot.

Uses

Globe head

For culinary purposes, the flower heads are picked before they fully open, and the tender centre is used as a delicate vegetable. Boil the whole flower then peel away the tougher bracts from which a soft base can be bitten off before discarding the rest. The tender heart of the flower is often combined with oils and dips or lemon juice, sometimes preserved in oil or brine. It contains vitamin B, folic acid, magnesium, calcium, potassium and manganese, zinc and iron.

For medicinal purposes the leaves are used for infusions or tinctures, their main effect being liver tonifying and stimulating bile flow. The extract of the Artichoke builds the main bitter component of the traditional European Aperitif drinks Campari and Cynar.

Origin & History

The plant grows wild in Northern Africa, where it originates from. It was brought to Southern Europe during the Greek and Roman occupation and was cultivated on the island of Sicily, in Naples, and further North in Avignon and Florence in the 16th century.

It was introduced into America in the 19th century by the French and Spanish immigrants and the centre of production is now Monterey in California.

In 1948 Marilyn Monroe was named the Artichoke Queen at the annual Artichoke Festival of Castroville, a town in Monterey County which claims to be the Artichoke Centre of the World. Henry VIII is also believed to have grown Artichokes in his Newhall garden in 1530.

The Artichoke is believed to be an aphrodisiac.

