

Growing Artichoke

Native to the Mediterranean, growing artichokes (*Cynara scolymus*) requires cool nights and warm days. Aside from providing delicious, tender thistles for the table, the plants themselves are gorgeous! They grow to 5 feet across and almost as high with beautiful gray fuzzy foliage.

Site Preparation:

Each spring, mix compost into your growing area. Artichokes require sandy, fast draining soil and cool temperatures to thrive. They need regular water for an ample harvest, but if you just like the look of the plant and don't want the thistles for your table, they will survive on very little water. Artichokes are susceptible to freezing and do best where the temperature remains constant year round.

How to Plant:

Plant artichokes in a location in full sun from bare root stock in January or from container grown stock later in the spring. To grow artichokes in cold winter climates, protect the root with several inches of straw mulch or better yet, grow them in large containers and move to a protected location when the temperature drops. Fertilize (after you see greenery) with a small amount of all-purpose fish fertilizer. Micronutrients from seaweed extract can be beneficial also.

Harvesting:

Artichokes are ready to harvest when the heads are closed tightly and squeak slightly when squeezed. If you wait for them to open, they will be too tough to eat. Search the interior of the plant, the chokes hide in the foliage. Small artichokes can be eaten whole, without removing the inside spiny choke. Artichokes take at least 110-150 days to reach maturity, if planting from seed and 100 days from divisions. Most do not flower until the second year of growth.

Once the harvest is over, cut the plants back to 1-2 inches off the ground to try for a second harvest. New sprouts will form at the base of the plant. At the end of the season, allow the plant to dry out after the leaves begin to turn yellow. Once the foliage has died down and dried, remove it from the plant and put down a layer of organic compost to enrich the soil for next years crop.

Insects and Diseases:

Protection from earwigs is mandatory. Also, keep an eye out for aphids, caterpillars, slugs and snails. Use diatomaceous earth or other natural pest control method, if present.