



Vegetable Gardening Tips

Growing Information for the Home Gardener Series



Artichokes

Artichoke Planting Guide

Artichokes are a member of the Asteraceae family. They are related to thistles, which is evident if you allow the choke — the mass at the center of the artichoke — to open and bloom. Artichokes prefer warm temperatures and thrive in USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 7 and higher. Louisiana ranges from zone 8 in the north to 10 on the coast. Most artichokes produced in the United States are grown in California, but don't let that hinder you from trying some in your Louisiana garden. Artichokes are rich in vitamins A, C, B-6 and B-12. They also provide calcium and iron, much-needed minerals in our diets.

Site Selection

Globe artichokes start small but grow into big plants. When planning your garden, think about an artichoke's mature size. One artichoke plant can take up a space 3 to 4 feet wide! Artichokes prefer full sunlight (at least 6 hours) and well-drained soil.

Planting

Artichokes can be planted from seed or as transplants. If starting from seed, sow them 12 weeks before you intend to plant. For example, sow seeds in mid-July for an October planting. Transplants are usually available at local nurseries, but sometimes you need to get on a waiting list. Let's just say this is a popular plant! Artichokes should be planted from October to early November. Don't plant them too deep. Dig the hole as deep as the root ball and a little wider. After planting, lightly press the soil around the base of the plant. Space individual plants at least 3 feet apart. Pull any weeds that emerge after planting.

Technically, artichokes are a perennial vegetable, but many times we lose them in the summer to disease. If you plan on tending to them throughout the summer, plant them in a location where they can grow for the long term, or simply treat them as an annual plant. Cold damage may affect artichoke growth because they are planted in the fall. Larger, more established artichokes do not need to be covered if temperatures should drop below 32 degrees F for several hours. However, if you just planted a small seedling and the temperatures drop below 32 degrees F in the first few weeks, covering it may help with a faster continued rate of growth. If a thin

layer of ice is on the plants, simply wait for the sun to melt it. Water at the base of the plant, and it should return to a turgid state.

Recommended Varieties

Green Globe, Imperial Star, Emerald (thornless), Romanesco (purple buds).



Fertilizer

Before planting, mix in 10 to 12 pounds of a complete fertilizer, such as 13-13-13, in the soil per 100-foot row. For smaller gardens apply 1 to 1.2 pounds of 13-13-13 for every 10 feet of row. This fertilizer will feed the artichokes after planting. Artichokes benefit from regular applications of an all-purpose fertilizer throughout the growing season. Side dress with 2 to 4 pounds of calcium nitrate per 100-foot row or a tablespoon per plant in smaller plantings in early February and again in March. Side dress means to apply fertilizer to the side of the plant. Don't apply the fertilizer too close to the base of the plant because it may burn the foliage.

Harvest

Pick artichokes when buds are 3 to 4 inches across and bracts are tight. Use sharp pruners to remove the bud from the stem. Don't cut the artichoke flush at the base. Instead leave a 1-to-2-inch section of the stem attached to increase shelf life. The edible portion of an artichoke is the immature flower bud. If you wait too long before harvesting the artichoke, the bract will open and turn into a showy purple flower. The fleshy bracts on the outside can be broken off and cooked. The most popular way to eat them is cooked in a spinach and artichoke dip. However, many people also dip the individual bracts in batter and fry. If you live in Louisiana, you may have seen artichokes in crawfish boils and fresh in salads. Enjoy your freshly grown artichokes. Just remember to leave plenty of space for these garden giants!

Pests

Diseases tend to overcome artichokes in the summer. To avoid this problem, you may choose to simply remove your plants and replant again next fall. Some people will dig artichokes out of the garden and move them to a shady location in the summer, tending to the plant in a container. If this is your choice, remember to keep the artichoke well-watered and spray preventatively with fungicides.

Insects may infest your artichoke plants, but they are usually manageable. Check often for snails and slugs, especially if you have mulched well. Scale and aphids may also be a problem in artichokes but are manageable when caught early, properly identified and treated with a labeled chemical. The LSU AgCenter does not advocate preventative insecticide sprays. Please collect an insect sample and have it identified before spraying.



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