

Cynara - Growing Guide

Cynara - Artichoke Growing Guide

Artichokes

Gardeners often get confused by edible 'globe' artichokes and the very different 'root' artichokes.

The clump forming, thistle like flowering perennials with edible flower centres originating from North Africa, the Canaries and elsewhere in the Mediterranean are Cynara (Cardoon / Globe Artichokes) while the Jerusalem artichokes whose roots you can eat are Helianthus tuberosus. Cynara are imposing architectural plants in a herbaceous border or in a separate bed in the vegetable garden. They have silvery grey leaves and spherical flower heads on tall stems rising above the plant. These can appear singly or in clusters later in the summer. The plants grow to around 4ft; the flower spikes to 6-8ft.

The flower head bracts and the base of what will become the subsequent flower itself are edible if boiled and delicious with melted butter (once you have cut away the start of the needle like flower head inside the centre of the bracts).

The flower heads can also be cut and dried off in the autumn to make attractive dried flower arrangements.

Cynara are fully hardy and greedy plants. They grow best in full sun and like fertile soil with the addition of plenty of well rotted dung and leaf mould both in the planting pit and as a top dressing above their roots. The seed heads can need some staking or metal supports to avoid damage in strong winds.

If you silvery foliage to be the backdrop to your border simply remove the flowering stalks to encourage more leaf growth without any flowers.

Cynara carduncularis (cardoon) have smaller flower heads with more pointed spikes and less that is edible in them. *Cynara scolymus* (globe artichoke) have much larger flower heads which can be 3-6in across and are without spikes. These make better eating but always be careful to cut them for cooking before there is any sign of the flower head coming out which is usually in September. Cut the flower heads progressively when fully formed but still in bud from perhaps June through to August. Act before the flowers get too big and tough.



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Cynara scolymus



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