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Artichokes in Contra Costa

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SUMMARY

Artichokes are easy to grow and beautiful too. And imagine, you're actually eating part of the inflorescence!

Castroville's gem can travel inland.

Q. I like artichokes and wonder if I can grow them in my Contra Costa garden.

A. Yes. The globe artichoke, *Cynara cardunculus* var. *scolymus*, may be grown easily in most parts of Contra Costa County.

We Northern Californians are fortunate to live near Castroville, the "artichoke capital of the world." Artichokes perform at their best in the moist, cool-to-mild climate adjacent to the California coast. A cool-season perennial, they produce all year long when temperatures stay near 75 degrees during the day and 55 at night.

Lucky for us, artichokes also grow in inland climates. Contra Costa gardeners just won't enjoy as great a yield as the farmers along the coast, and we will have to replace our plants more frequently than they do.

Artichokes are fun to grow. They have an ornamental architectural form, and the

buds become beautiful 6-inch blue-purple flowers if not cut for eating. The long, curving stems and thistlelike blooms can be dried for indoor decorating.

Allow plenty of space: Artichokes will grow to 3 to 4 feet or more in both height and breadth. You need only a few plants, and they should produce throughout the spring-summer growing season. I usually get four to eight artichokes per plant in my Central County garden.

Plants may be started from seed, but you may want to pick up starts at a local nursery. Transplants and root divisions can be planted in fall or early spring. Fall planting allows time for the artichokes to become well rooted and reach a reasonable size for spring bud production.

Keep in mind, however, that frequent hard frosts can damage buds and stems.



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Cultural Requirements

Artichokes need four to six hours of sun per day, but light afternoon shade is ideal where summers turn hot. They will produce best if given regular deep watering, loose fertile soil with organic matter added, and monthly nitrogen fertilizer during spring and summer.

Harvesting

Harvest the artichokes, along with two to three inches of stem, when the buds have grown to maximum size, but before the leaves of the bud begin to spread

open. Harvest the top bud first. This will allow the lateral buds to reach maturity. Spent plants may be cut off at ground level to encourage new growth from the base. They may survive for a second year.

For more information

For more information on occasional pest problems and other topics, go to

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/VEGES/artichokes.html>