

## Artichokes – A Vegetable That Grows Like a Weed

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Want a suggestion for a striking perennial plant that grows in flowerbeds, in vegetable gardens, survives in lean soil with little water, and produces food for the table? The artichoke might just “fit the bill”.

Globe artichokes (*Cynara scolymus*) are thistle-like plants with deeply lobed silvery blue-green leaves, and bear edible buds (about 3-5 inches). They are believed to have originated in the Mediterranean region where they grow wild. The plant typically grows to a height of 5 feet and blooms prolifically in good garden soil.

Artichoke buds are covered with scales and have a fleshy base, known as the “heart”, and a mass of immature florets in the center called the “choke”. These become inedible as the flower matures. If the bud is left to bloom, it opens to a lovely thistle-like purple flower. Artichoke plants thrive in the cool humid climate along the coast. Buy rootstock, divide roots, or start new plants from seed. Add plenty of organic matter and slow-release fertilizer to the soil when planting. Provide supplementary water to the soil during the dry season.

Cut off dead leaves with a lopper as they appear at the bottom to prevent damage to developing shoots. When the main stalk has finished producing, cut the plant to the ground, let it rest a few weeks, and then begin watering again. You’ll soon have another beautiful plant that produces unique and unusual vegetable for your dining table.