

Artichokes

Information compiled by the California Artichoke Advisory Board

How Produced – The artichoke is a member of the thistle tribe of plants in the sunflower (Compositae) family. The vegetable we eat is the immature flower heads of the artichoke plant.

Historically, artichokes were grown as perennial plants along the central coast of California that provided the ideal growing environment to allow the artichokes flowers to mature slower giving the lover of artichokes that special eating experience. Only a few hundred acres of the artichokes grown as perennials exist today. The acreage diminished because of finite yields, increased pest pressures, and increased costs.

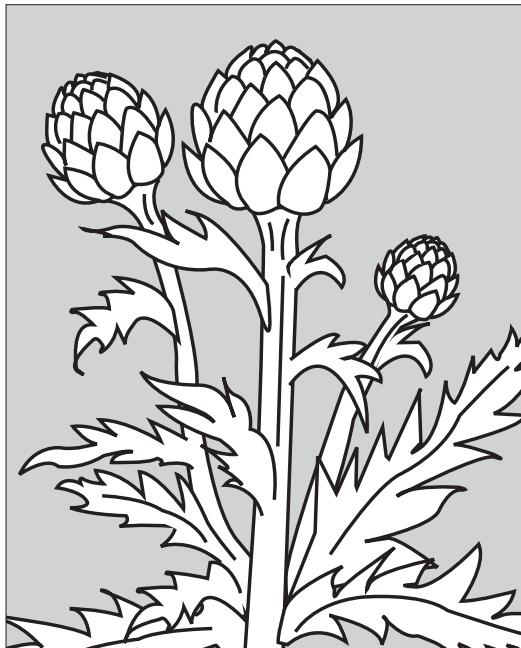
Today, most artichokes are planted into fields as small 4 to 6 - inch transplants grown in nurseries from seed. These fields are cultivated and irrigated until ready to harvest approximately 6 months later. This change to an annual artichoke culture allows California growers to rotate their artichoke crops with other crops like cauliflower and lettuce – thereby reducing pest pressures and costs with increased yields.

Artichokes are an extremely labor-intensive crop with labor representing 40 to 60 percent of the growing costs. Artichokes are harvested entirely by hand. The same artichoke field will be harvested every seven days and even more often during the peak season of March through May. Artichokes are sorted and packed in the field, by hand, into waxed cartons and immediately trucked to cooling facilities where they are refrigerated to 34 degrees Fahrenheit and 98% humidity.

Varieties – Several varieties are grown in California today, but most of the artichokes grown are proprietary hybrid varieties that do well in specific harvest windows. Varieties are classified as thorned to semi-thorned to thornless. The different varieties can be grown in different parts of California, targeting particular harvest windows.

Although not a different variety, “Frost-Kissed” artichokes caused by winter frosts (temperature dropping below 32 degrees) are available in stores for a limited time. Frost causes the outer layer of the artichoke to turn brown, flake and peel, much like a sunburn. Many believe frost enhances the flavor of the artichoke resulting in a nutty taste.

Commodity Value – California produces virtually 100% of the nation's supply of fresh artichokes. The artichoke industry provides hundreds of jobs and annually contributes more than \$78 million to the state's economy. The 2019-2020 crop year produced more than 3,386,000 cartons of artichokes, averaging 22 pounds each, on 4,234 acres statewide.



Top Producing Counties – The artichoke was named the official vegetable of California and is also the official vegetable of Monterey County where approximately 68% of the state's artichokes are grown. In 2019, artichokes ranked 15th in crop value for this agriculturally rich area. Other top producing counties include Riverside, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, San Mateo and Ventura.

History – Artichokes are one of the oldest known foods. They were cultivated in the Mediterranean basin thousands of years ago. Theophrastus, an Ancient Greek philosopher and naturalist (317 B.C. – 287 B.C.), wrote of them being grown in Italy and Sicily. During the late nineteenth century, California's first commercial artichoke fields were planted by Italian immigrants south of San Francisco near Half Moon Bay. The modern artichoke industry started during the 1920s in Castroville, California. Today, Castroville is the self-proclaimed “Artichoke Center of the World.”

Nutritional Value – One 12-ounce artichoke contains 25 calories, is low in sodium, and contains no fat or cholesterol. One medium artichoke is an excellent source of fiber and vitamin C, and a good source of folate and magnesium. Artichokes also contain phytochemicals, antioxidants in the flavonoid family, which are beneficial in the prevention of certain cancers and boosting the body's immunity. Recent research shows cooked artichokes are a good source of antioxidants. Health professionals recommend a low-fat diet with at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

For additional information:
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