

## Vegetable of the Month: Artichoke

The artichoke was first developed in Sicily and was known to both the Greeks and the Romans. In 77 AD the Roman naturalist Pliny called the choke one of earth's monstrosities, but many continued to eat them. Historical accounts show that wealthy Romans enjoyed artichokes prepared in honey and vinegar, seasoned with cumin, so that this treat would be available year round. Serving size 1 med. artichoke, cooked

It was not until the early twentieth century that artichokes were grown in the United States. All artichokes commercially grown in the United States are grown in California and Castroville, California, claims to be the "Artichoke Capital of the World." California even has an Artichoke Queen — the most famous queen was Marilyn Monroe in 1947. She inspired more people to eat artichokes in that year reign than any year before or after. Artichokes are actually a flower bud - if allowed to flower, blossoms measure up to seven inches in diameter and are a violet-blue color. Artichokes are a close relative to the thistle.

### Varieties

Green Globe: year round and peaks in spring.

Desert Globe: available from December through March and July to September.

Big Heart: year round, with a lull in April.

Imperial Star: year round and peaks in spring.

Did you know?

The Jerusalem artichoke isn't in the artichoke family, but is a member of the sunflower family. Its 'official' name is actually sunchoke.

### Selection

High-quality artichokes are usually compact and heavy for their size. Squeezed, a fresh artichoke will make a squeak. The thickness of each stalk should correspond to the size of the artichoke. Thin stalks signal dehydration, so look for stalks that are firm without 'give.'

### Storage

Artichokes remain fairly constant in appearance for weeks, but flavor is adversely affected from the moment they are cut from the stalk. For maximum taste and tenderness, cook as soon as possible. Do not stock up on artichokes. Refrigerate unwashed, in a plastic bag, for up to 1 week.

### Preparation

Artichokes should be washed under cold running water. Pull off the lower petals and cut the stems to one inch or less. Cut the top quarter of each artichoke and snip off the sharp tips. Artichokes turn brown very quickly once they are cut. To preserve the green color, one may dip in lemon water. Artichokes can be boiled, steamed, microwaved or sautéed. They can be eaten whole or added to other dishes. Cooked artichokes may be refrigerated for several days in a covered container. **Microwave:** cook 6 to 8 minutes or until a petal near the center pulls out easily. **Boiling:** Stand artichokes in a large pan with 3 quarts boiling water. Cover and boil gently 20 to 40 minutes according to size, or until the petal near the center pulls out easily. Small artichokes are good for pickling, stews, casseroles; medium size are good for salads and large size are good for stuffing. To eat, pull off leaves and eat the fleshy ends that were attached to the plant. Lift out the cone and cut out the core, which is the fuzzy portion at the center. The heart is a true delicacy and will break easily with a fork. Dip the leaves in lemon juice or try the low-fat dipping sauce in the recipe section.