

Cool Weather (Perennial) Vegetables

GLOBE ARTICHOKE:

The artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*) is native to the southern Mediterranean areas of Europe. In itself, it's a handsome perennial plant specimen, well-suited to the background of a perennial border with its large silvery green leaves and a fountain-like growth habit. This plant grows to 4 feet tall and sometimes as wide and should be spaced accordingly. If the "chokes" are not harvested, spectacular purple blue 6" thistle flowers stand above the clump. These can be cut and used in arrangements.

Of course, artichokes are grown mainly for the young, tender budded flowers that we use as a vegetable. They are grown commercially along the cool summer coastal strip of California where they produce September through May. In other Bay area climates, plants grow very well from spring through autumn with most chokes produced in early summer.

Plant artichokes in late winter or early spring. Prepare the soil to a depth of 1 to 1 ½ feet with Loam Builder or Planting Mix. When new growth commences, feed with Maxsea All Purpose or EB Stone All Purpose Food at the recommended rate. Place the plants in full sun. Water well weekly after growth starts to produce a good crop. If grown only as an ornamental, they will tolerate some drought. After the chokes have been harvested, or finished flowering, cut the stems back to ground level. In cold winter areas, protect the plants by cutting back to 1 foot, tie the stems into a tight clump and cover with straw to protect the crown.

The most damaging pests of artichokes are slugs, snails and aphids. Slugs and snails can be controlled with the application of Sluggo, a non-toxic bait to non-target animals. Apply in the fall and early spring around the plants. Aphids appear in mid-spring and can either be hosed off with water or sprayed with Bonide All Seasons Oil. Insecticidal Soap is also effective.

ASPARAGUS:

Asparagus (*Asparagus officinales*) belongs to the lily family and originated in northern Europe. Asparagus is a very popular vegetable and once established, a clump can produce for 10-15 years. The feathery foliage of asparagus is very attractive, so clumps can be mixed in with a flower border.

New crowns with attached roots are planted in winter to early spring. A sunny, well-drained site is a must. Prepare the soil well before planting to provide support for this long-lived plant. Lots of Loam Builder and Planting Mix is recommended. Dig a trench about 1 foot wide and 8" to 10" deep, with rows some 4 to 6 feet apart. Plant the crowns in loose, wet, enriched soil placed in the bottom of the trench, spacing about 1 foot apart with the tops 6-8 inches below the surface. Cover the roots with about 2 inches of soil and water. As the plants grow, gradually fill in the trench, leaving the tips exposed.

Do not harvest any spears the first year. Feed and irrigate heavily. During drought, deep watering is especially important; roots eventually will grow to a 6 foot depth! Cut to the ground in late fall



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or early winter after the plants turn brown. Some spears can be harvested in the second spring; full production is usually reached by the third spring. The cutting season begins when the spears appear. Harvest lasts for 4 to 6 weeks for young clumps and 8 to 10 weeks for established (third year and beyond) clumps. Stop when spears become thin, indicating the roots are tiring. After this, allow the spears to develop their fern-like tops. Leave these alone until frost, as they are producing food reserves for the next year.

Each spring, as soon as the soil can be worked, 3 to 5 pounds per 100 sq. ft. of a 16-16-16 or All Purpose fertilizer should be worked in before growth begins. This can be repeated again at the end of harvest if the soil is sandy or if you won't be using a fall mulch such as Forest Mulch Plus.

RHUBARB:

Rhubarb (*Rheum raphaniticum*) is a native to the coldest portions of Asia (Tibet, Mongolia and China) and belongs to the Buckwheat family (Polygonaceae). Because of its large leaves, British gardeners have grown it as an ornamental for well over 300 years. It is said that Benjamin Franklin brought the plant to North America. It wasn't until the mid 1800's that the leaf stalks were used for pies and preserves. Specimen plants can be spaced in the garden border and, after harvest stops, allowed to develop as large-leafed ornamentals. Rhubarb plants produce a not unattractive flower stalk, but these should be removed, as they divert food reserves that should go to the storage roots for next year's crop.

Rhubarb will grow in almost any soil, but does best when fertilized and planted in deep, rich, well-drained soil. Plant in full sun on the coast but give some shade inland. Because this plant is

best undisturbed, soil preparation is important. Prepare the planting site with Loam Builder or Planting Mix and incorporate Sure Start according to the directions. Set out plants in late winter or early spring. Place the tops of divisions at the soil line and space 3 feet apart. Provide ample water during active growth. During drought periods, water deeply every 2 weeks or so. Plants grow best where summers are cool and winters are frosty. Apply a thick layer of Forest Mulch Plus after the first fall frost.

Allow plants to grow undisturbed for 2 full seasons, not harvesting any stalks. The following spring, harvest the tender, young leaf stalks by pulling outward and to the side; do not cut with a knife or pruners as this will cause decay. The leaves are poisonous - DO NOT EAT. Eat only the stalks. Harvest should stop after 3 to 4 weeks (longer for older plants) when fresh, young shoots begin to emerge. After harvest, feed and water regularly.