



Zion Farmers Market Veg-u-cation

All "Choked" Up



Artichokes are actually young, unopened thistle buds from the daisy family. If left to mature, the flowers can reach up to 5 feet in height. They are descendants of a similar thistle plant known as the cardoon, which can still be found thriving in the wild. Unlike cardoons, the artichoke is now exclusively cultivated for food. Its thick green petals, formally known as bracts or phyllaries, are topped with tiny thorns. The long stem has a fibrous, woody texture that resembles a young tree branch. It's a very odd looking sort of thing. You would be hard-pressed to convince the uninitiated that it's even meant to be food. And yet, when properly prepared, artichokes are a savory, delectable treat.

The exact origins of the artichoke are unclear. Culinary historians have debated over whether or not artichokes were enjoyed by the ancient Greeks and Romans, given mosaics that depict what appears to be the same thorny flower. These are now widely believed to be cardoons. Most historians agree that artichokes first appeared in the Mediterranean basin. Though we don't know exactly when they became recognized as a food source, we do know that artichokes have been eaten by Jews for several centuries. The Talmud states, "one may trim the artichoke [...] on a festival" for cooking. The ancient Israelites even had a special unit of measurement for artichokes called *kundasa*. By the 11th century, after the Moors began cultivating them in Spain, artichokes were adopted by Sephardic Jews.

There are now over 50 varieties of culinary artichokes in the world, but here in America we are most familiar with the Italian green globe variety. The artichoke was chosen as California's official "State Vegetable"—fitting, since that state supplies 100% of the globe artichokes available commercially in America. The artichoke's journey to California began on the East coast where French allied soldiers introduced them to America during the Revolutionary War. Globe artichokes began appearing in Virginia around the 1720s. In California, the artichoke was not seen as a favorable cash crop until the 1890s, when Italian farmers in Half Moon Bay planted them. By 1904, they were filling boxcars with artichokes to send to the East coast. In 1922, the Italian farmers moved their artichokes to California's Salinas Valley, where they have been growing ever since.



As vegetables go, the Artichoke is among the most fascinating visually. It is as beautiful as it is delightful to eat. You may be interested to know that the Artichoke is actually the bud of a plant from the thistle family and at full maturity, the plant grows to a width of about six feet and a height of three to four. If not harvested from the plant, the bud will eventually blossom into a beautiful, blue-violet flower, which is not edible.

The bud contains the Heart, the delightful, meaty core of the Artichoke, and is topped by a fuzzy center, or choke, which is surrounded by rows of petals, which protect the Artichoke Heart. With their tiny thorns, the Artichoke's petals reveal their thistle heritage. The thorns aren't a problem if handled carefully and they soften in cooking. Beware of Artichokes promoted as thornless. They have smaller Hearts, less meat and their flavor is not as robust as the proprietary Globe varieties grown by Ocean Mists Farms.

People love to eat artichokes. What's not to love? From the leaves to the heart, artichokes are simply delicious. However, you might not be aware of the humble artichoke's position as a nutrient powerhouse and the amazing health benefits you can have simply by adding this veggie to your diet. We boiled down the artichoke's many benefits to the 12 best and unexpected ways that artichokes can positively impact your health.

1. Antioxidants

Artichokes are a superfood in every sense of the word. The phytonutrients in artichokes provide potent antioxidant benefits, and a 2006 study conducted by the US Department of Agriculture and published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition showed that a serving of artichokes provides greater antioxidant benefits per serving than many other foods traditionally considered to be antioxidant-rich such as dark chocolate, blueberries and red wine.

Anthocyanins, quercetin, rutin, and many other antioxidants contained in fresh artichokes offer a range of health benefits ranging from cancer prevention and immune support to protection against heart disease.

2. Dietary Fiber

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines published by the USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services recommend that men consume between 30 and 38 g of dietary fiber per day, and that women consume between 21 and 25 g per day.

Currently the average American consumes roughly half this amount, leading to many potential health effects such as an increased risk of gut-related diseases and colonic cancer.

One 120 g artichoke provides a whopping 10.3 g of dietary fiber, making them a powerful tool

for helping to not just keep you regular but also to improve your digestive health overall.

However, the digestive benefits of artichokes are not limited just to their fiber content.

3. Digestive Support

German doctors have long recommended artichoke leaf extract as a gentle remedy for indigestion and upset stomach.

This may be due to a compound found in artichokes called cynarin which has been shown to increase the production of bile, helping to speed up the movement of food and waste through the intestines and reduce feelings of bloating.

In fact, a study conducted with 247 individuals showed that 86% reported a satisfactory improvement of symptoms such as bloating and flatulence after using an artichoke leaf extract supplement.

One of the major sources of fiber found in artichokes is inulin, which is a prebiotic. Prebiotics can increase the proportion of probiotics or 'good bacteria' in the gut.

4. Cholesterol

In a 2001 study 143 patients suffering from high levels of total blood cholesterol and were administered with 1800 mg of artichoke leaf extract per day for a period of six weeks.

When compared to placebo the artichoke leaf extract showed a clear reduction of around 20% "bad" LDL cholesterol and 18% total blood cholesterol; the group taking the placebo reduced their total cholesterol level by around 8%.

5. Brain and Cognitive Benefits

Artichokes provide around 12% of the recommended daily intake of vitamin K.

This vitamin may offer protection against neuronal damage and degeneration, thereby helping to keep cognitive diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease at bay in elderly individuals. In a study published by the journal *Nutrients*, researchers found that eating a diet that included more vitamin K was associated with better cognition in elderly people.

6. Liver Health

A 2010 study published in the Journal of Biological Trace Element Research showed significant reduction levels of lipids and cholesterol in the livers of mice fed a high-cholesterol diet when administered with artichoke extract.

Artichokes, as well as artichoke extracts from the leaves and stems of the plant have been historically recommended for liver health. Ongoing research seems to indicate that artichokes have qualities that may protect the liver and decrease blood lipids, such as cholesterol, in the body. Some researchers think that the mechanism for beneficial effects on the liver may be related to increased flow of bile from the liver. Among the most powerful phytonutrients in artichokes, cynarin and silymarin have strong positive effects on the liver.

7. Cancer Prevention

We have already established the antioxidant protection that some of the phytonutrients in artichokes can provide, but the cancer prevention benefits extend beyond this.

Rutin, quercetin, and gallic acid in particular are able to induce apoptosis or cell death within the body, and while this may sound like a bad thing it can actually help to prevent the proliferation of cells which leads to many forms of cancer.

What's more, a study released by the University of Georg-August showed how phytonutrients found in artichokes can interfere with estrogen receptors and help to blunt the release of prostate specific antigen or PSA.

This suggests a great deal of promise in the use of artichoke leaf extract for the prevention and treatment of prostate cancer in men.

8. Folic Acid

Artichokes provide around 107 mcg folic acid per serving, more than a quarter of the daily recommended amount of 400 mcg. Women who are pregnant or attempting to conceive should consume even more folic acid, since it can be instrumental in preventing neural tube defects in developing embryos, as well as increasing fertility in both men and women.

Furthermore, folic acid has been linked to prevention of other complications that can occur during pregnancy and childbirth, including pre-eclampsia, cleft lips, congenital heart defects.

The list of pregnancy-related health benefits attributed to folic acid is extensive and growing, so artichokes are a fantastic addition to the diet any pregnant woman or nursing mother.

9. Blood Pressure

Foods high in potassium such as bananas, sweet potatoes, and of course artichokes help to maintain a healthy balance of electrolytes within the body.

Consuming plenty of potassium and magnesium is essential for offsetting the potentially harmful effects of consuming too much sodium, and in particular can help to prevent or combat hypertension or high blood pressure.

Women and other individuals suffering from water retention may also find this useful because it elicits a mild diuretic effect to help shed excess fluid from the body.

10. Bone Health

Earlier we discussed the vitamin K content of artichokes and how it may help to reduce vascular calcification.

Another interesting benefit of vitamin K is the role that it plays in the formation of bones and the general support of ongoing bone health.

Artichokes also contain vitamin C which, as well as being well known for its immune-boosting properties, is also directly involved in the formation of a protein known as collagen. Collagen is essential for the health of our skin, bones, and connective tissues.

Magnesium and potassium are also crucial building blocks of many tissues throughout the body, with magnesium helping to enhance the uptake and absorption of calcium.

This quite clearly suggests further bone and joint health benefits offered by artichokes.

11. Metabolic Function

Another interesting and highly beneficial nutrient found in artichokes is manganese.

Manganese is used in the metabolism of cholesterol, amino acids, and fatty acids, making it absolutely essential in enabling the body to correctly utilise the nutrients in the foods we eat.

If you are trying to lose weight and optimising your metabolism should be one of the top priorities, and the manganese content of artichokes excellent tool to add to your arsenal for this purpose.

12. Protection Against Free Radicals

By this point, the antioxidant and overall protective properties of artichokes should be quite clear to you.

There are a number of environmental and lifestyle factors which can cause oxidation of our cells, leading to cellular damage which can compromise the body's ability to protect itself against disease and further toxins.

The simple functions and processes that our body undergoes on a daily basis often produce compounds which are known as free radicals as a by-product stop.

These free radicals, when left unchecked and unbalanced, can cause significant stress on our cells and lead to the kind of oxidative damage described above.

Obviously this is something we want to avoid or minimize as much as possible!

Artichokes contain compounds which can essentially "scavenge" and neutralise free radicals and other environmental toxins before they can cause significant damage in the body.



There are many ways to prepare artichokes. They can be steamed, boiled, grilled, and even fried. Smaller baby artichoke hearts, available in cans or jars (and seasonally available fresh during May/June), can be used in salads and sautés. Marinated baby artichoke hearts are particularly popular as a pizza topping and in salads. Larger artichokes can be served raw or cooked as an appetizer, side or entree, and are best served with a sauce to compliment their flavor. Many people have never experienced the joy of eating an Artichoke because they never learned how to eat one. The good news is that eating an Artichoke is easy, and definitely something to be savored slowly and sumptuously.

When you prepare an Artichoke, you discard the center "choke" (except in baby Artichokes), but the base of the petals, the center of the stem and the entire Artichoke Heart are completely edible and easy to cook. That's when all the fun begins!

Start by pulling off one of the outermost petals. Dip the base of the petal into your favorite sauce. Many people prefer melted butter or mayonnaise, but there is no limit to the types of dips

or sauces that can be used.

Pull the petal through your slightly clenched teeth to remove the soft, tender flesh at the bottom of the petal. Discard remainder (you'll want to have an empty bowl ready in which to drop them).

Continue until all petals have been removed. You will now have arrived at one of the great culinary rewards: the Heart! If the fuzzy choke guarding the Heart hasn't been removed, scoop it out with a spoon. [Click Here](#) to learn more about removing the choke's fuzzy center.

Cut the remaining Artichoke Heart into bite-sized pieces, dip and enjoy!

Cooking Artichokes

Decide if you need to cook just one Artichoke or multiple Artichokes at a time. Either way, you can cook Artichokes ahead and store them in your refrigerator for several days before eating them or using them in a recipe.

Next, take your fresh Artichoke and rinse it well under cold water. If you have one handy, we even recommend using any soft kitchen brush and giving the choke a quick brush down to remove the natural, light film an Artichoke produces while growing. This can give the choke a bitter taste if not removed. "Top and tail" the Artichoke with your knife: With a sharp, serrated kitchen knife, cut about one inch from the top of the Artichoke. Then, trim the stem about one half inch or remove the stem if you need it to "sit up" on a plate for stuffing or filling. Remember, the Artichoke stem is a continuation of the Heart, so don't cut it off unless you need you to.

For restaurant-style presentation of Artichokes, take any scissors or kitchen shears and snip off the thorns on the tip of the Artichoke petals (Note: this step is optional, as the thorns tend to soften with cooking).

Many cooks like to also rub the cut portion of the Artichoke with the juice of a fresh lemon to prevent it from browning. Again, this step is optional.

Lastly, don't be afraid to spread open the petals slightly to allow any seasoning you may use to fall in between the Artichoke petals for flavor.

Now, your Artichoke is ready to cook!

No matter how you serve them, artichokes are pretty much the best thing ever.

What's your favorite way to eat artichokes?



