



## Zion Farmers Market KidCraft

### Crepe Paper Artichoke



Artichokes are not exactly “kid friendly” vegetables. The strange, prickly, cactus-like plant might even cause one feel intimidated. Eating an artichoke is like hunting for buried treasure—scraping the leaves with your teeth, each one giving you a tantalizing taste of the sweet heart in the center. It takes work to get to that heart. Like anything worth having in life, the greater the challenge, the greater the reward.

#### **Supplies**

- 2.5 inch foam ball
- Scissors
- Crepe paper
- Glue

#### **Instructions**

Cut crepe square and stretch around ball. Twist top and clip to make short stem. Cut short on bottom and glue flat.

Trim pieces of crepe in to small, medium and large leaf shapes. Curl all pieces by stretching centers.

Starting with smallest pieces, glue around stem, overlapping pieces and moving down and around ball form.

Continue with medium pieces. Finish with large pieces covering all but base. Finish with last six pieces to fully cover base.

### **Artichoke Facts for Kids**

Hi, I'm so glad you've come to see me. You're obviously a person who doesn't make judgments on appearances and believes in a 'fair go'. I appreciate that. Sorry, I forgot to introduce myself.

I'm a globe artichoke - not one of the vegetable world's pin-ups but you'll like me once you get to know me. Hey, don't confuse me with those other guys - the Jerusalem artichoke. Now they're really ugly, but what can you expect from a vegetable that grows underground!

Many people regard me as a prickly sort of character but that's only because I grow on a pretty formidable thistle. Get to know the real me and you'll fall for me in a big way. Let me tell you about myself.

As I said, I grow on a large thistle which can reach 1.5 metres in height (how tall are you? Would it be bigger or smaller than you are?). It has prickly leaves which are grey-green to bronze-green in colour, often with a purplish tinge. We form on branches that grow out from the side of the main stem and are actually the flower buds of the plant. If we're not picked we go on to develop into a beautiful purple flower, which then forms seeds with downy tufts so that we can leave home when we're caught by the wind and blown away from our parent plant to land in the ground and grow into new thistles...oh, I'm dreaming...back to my story.

The right time to pick us is when we're sweet and tender. If left to flower we can't be eaten because we become dry, woody and you really wouldn't like us.

We grow to about the size of a tennis ball (do you play tennis?) and are usually round to conical in shape and made up of large leathery petals (like an unopened rose). Our petals (botanists call them bracts) surround and protect our tender centre which would grow into a flower if not eaten first. You can eat both this centre part and the succulent base of each of our petals.

We come in two main colors - green and purple and are usually sold as a bud with the stem and a few leaves attached.

As the heading for this site is Artichokes I suppose I'd better tell you something about those other guys. Jerusalem artichokes are tubers with small knobs (swollen underground stems like potatoes and ginger) which belong to the yellow-flowered sunflower family. They grow to 7-10cm long and about 3-5cm thick, rather like ginger. I'm told they have a honey brown skin which encloses a crisp, tasty, white flesh but don't you go off trying them before you try me. We made friends first, remember.

### **Availability**

Although we're available from February to November we're at our peak in August - September.

### **Did you know?**

- Artichokes are one of the oldest foods known to humans.
- Marilyn Monroe was the first official California Artichoke Queen in 1947.

### **Varieties**

We're not usually sold by our variety, so just look out for the name Globe artichoke.

### **Why Artichokes Are Good To Eat**

Look, we not only taste great but we can do a lot for you.

Consider this:

- We're a good source of folate (one of the B group of vitamins) which keeps your blood healthy and helps you grow well. It's especially important for mums to get enough folate at the beginning of a pregnancy to help reduce the risk of some birth defects in the baby
- We are a great source of dietary fibre, and we all know that keeps your bowel working well
- We also have some vitamin C, no fat and very few kilojoules

### **How they are Grown and Harvested**

As I told you, we grow on the thistle plant which has very long stems with large branches that arc out like a Christmas tree. Some varieties have long arching spiked leaves which makes them look like giant ferns. As I said, if we're not picked for eating we turn into beautiful purple flowers. We're grown in rows and when fully mature our parent plant can cover an area over 2 metres in diameter. About 15 of us grow on each plant. We prefer to grow in a colder climate but a cold chill (less than 10°C) or frosts will blemish our budding flowers but we're still perfectly good to eat if our outer bracts are removed.

Our parent plant is grown in one of two ways either from seed or from cuttings. Plants that are grown from cuttings start with a piece of root placed carefully into holes in long rows.

The Global Star variety produces artichokes that are spikeless, thus enabling safer and easier handling. They're grown from seed as an annual which means that they're replanted each year as opposed to the rest of us which are perennial (we have a long life span and flower every year).

Harvesting occurs about 5-6 months after the crop has been planted. I'm in my prime for eating just before my flower starts to open. If baby artichokes are needed it requires special attention to ensure they're picked at the right time.

### **Choosing Artichokes**

To pick the best of us select small to medium, compact, bright green, plump globes that feel heavy for their size. Large artichokes tend to be a little tougher and have less flavour than the smaller ones.

### **How to Keep Artichokes**

Store us unwashed in plastic bags in the crisper section of the refrigerator. We'll keep for approximately two weeks.

### **History of Artichoke**

Our ancestors were North African thistles which still grow wild today. People from the Middle East were thought to have been some of the earliest groups to use us as a food. Due to our great taste, we quickly become popular and by Roman times, around 70 - 80 AD, only the rich were allowed to eat us and we were forbidden to the common people, which wasn't fair was it?

We were first cultivated in Italy in the early 15th century and were also eaten in France and England during the Middle Ages.

Seed catalogues show we were available throughout the 19th century but by the first half of this century we seemed to lose our popularity. It was the Italians, who migrated in the 1940's and 1950's, who brought us back into favor. They adore us and cook us so well that now everybody wants to eat us.

### **Fun Ways to Eat and Cook Artichokes**

Artichokes are not as difficult to prepare and eat as we may appear. To prepare an artichoke, cut off the stem and remove any tough outer leaves. Cut the top off and trim tips of remaining leaves.

Brush all cut surfaces with lemon juice or soak in lemon and water to prevent browning. Cook whole, discarding the fuzzy centre or 'choke' either before or after cooking. Stems can be left on for some recipes if the leaves and fibrous outer green layer are removed first. The base or 'bottom' of the artichoke is the most succulent part. Artichoke hearts, mostly available in cans, are baby artichokes.

Artichokes may be steamed, boiled, microwaved. Boil or steam for 20-40 minutes or microwave for 4-8 minutes depending on size and serve hot or cold. Gently push fork into base of the artichoke to test if it is cooked. They can be stuffed, added to stews, casseroles, soups, sauces, dips, salads or served as a vegetable.