



Globe Artichokes from Sicily – Colin



Description of area

Colin comes from a farming region in a mountainous area of Sicily. The soil retained enough moisture to not need watering. The climate in Sicily is extremely hot in the summer and starts to cool down from late September. Winter is quite mild with only December and January being slightly cold.

Background to Colin

Colin comes from a farming background, where his parents grew all the food, including bread wheat, for the extended family. He now lives in the UK, and has successfully grown many plants from Italy on his allotment.

"Artichokes... I plant a lot, 'cause we used to have so many... in Sicily, my dad used to grow them"

Crops grown in the region

A wide range of crops can be grown including tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, artichokes and broccoli. Many fruits such as figs, grapes and citrus fruits (especially oranges) can be grown all the year round outdoors. There is a long tradition of picking wild food such as wild spinach, fennel and capers.

"My dad used to grow everything... vineyards, we had the pears, apples, cabbage, peas, anything you can think of. And we never used to go to shop to buy any fruit"

Growing Artichokes in Sicily

Artichokes have been grown in Italy since Roman times and are still cultivated in large fields across central and southern Italy and Sicily. They are used in many different ways including salads, grilling and stuffing.

"My mum had a speciality for the artichoke, she used to open them up... pour a cheese inside... then stand up in the pan. When they were cooked they were so tasty, really nice. But I miss that because I don't know how to do it, as my mum is no longer here..."



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Growing and using Globe Artichokes in the UK

Globe Artichokes are perennial. They are best grown by taking offsets from another established plant, as plants grown from seed vary in quality. A clump will survive for at least eight to ten years, but will need dividing after around five years. The plants can be killed in very cold or wet weather. Avoid very exposed sites.

How to grow

Crop details: Perennial: seed or divisions.

Time to harvest: 2 years after sowing. Grow alone. Size: Very large.

Growing timeline: Sow indoors April–May, Plant out August to October or following spring. Harvest May to August following year.



Plant

Remove basal suckers in April to May, and plant in a sunny, sheltered site with good drainage. Space plants at least 1.2m/4ft apart.

Grow

Established plants will benefit from a mulch of well-rotted garden compost at the start of the growing season but require little other care apart from keeping them free of weeds. In very cold weather, protect the crowns with a layer of straw or horticultural fleece, but beware of slugs who enjoy the shelter too.

Harvest

In spring the young flower buds will emerge. Cut off as soon as large enough to eat whole or allow to develop to full size but always pick before the blue petals open. If you keep cutting buds off, the plant will continue to crop for a long time, but if you allow one flower to open it will stop the crop for the season.

Cook

Globe artichokes are usually steamed or boiled before serving hot with melted butter or Hollandaise sauce, or cold with a vinaigrette or mayonnaise. Small flower buds can be eaten whole but mature ones will need the petals or 'choke' removing before eating. The part eaten is the layer of flesh attached to the base of each petal - they are not tidy things to eat!

