



## **Growing Artichokes**

### **By Pat Carpenter**

Most of the artichokes you find in our local grocery stores are grown in the central coastal valleys of California. The town of Castroville in Monterey County calls itself the “The Artichoke Capital of the World” and hosts a huge artichoke festival in June. But did you know you can grow artichokes successfully right here in Mason County?

Growing them is relatively simple as long as you follow a few guidelines. They are perennials so it is important to grow them in a spot in your garden that has good drainage, loamy soil and enough room to spread as they will grow quite large, 3 to 4 feet across and will last at least five years if given adequate winter protection. They will also self-propagate by growing offshoots. They have deep roots and are fairly drought tolerant. Adding compost is helpful, some shade is ok.

Surprisingly, artichokes are easy to start from seed. There are several varieties to choose from, but the most common is the heirloom Green Globe. There are also smaller purple varieties, known as Violetta’s, which originated in Italy, which is the largest producer of artichokes worldwide. Start seeds indoors under lights in late winter then plant them outdoors after the last frost a couple of months later. With adequate fertile soil they are fast growers and will take 100-120 days to mature. If your site is too cold, they can be grown as annuals but there is less chance of getting a good harvest of buds. Still, it is fun to give them a try. In late fall cut the plants back to about four inches and cover with mulch. Even if they freeze like mine did this cold winter, they can make a comeback and surprise you with lots of new growth.

While most people grow artichokes to harvest the tasty buds, they are also striking ornamental plants in the thistle family with their gray serrated leaves and showy lavender thistle blooms when left to flower. Each plant will produce several edible buds, be sure to harvest them before they flare open for maximum tenderness.

The Master Gardeners will have artichoke plant starts for sale at their online annual plant sale May 6 – 9. Visit [mgfmc.org](http://mgfmc.org) for details.

Written by Pat Carpenter

Pat has been gardening for over 50 years, with gardens in California, Idaho and Washington. She became a WSU Mason County Master Gardener in 2009 after retiring from teaching at Hood Canal School.

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