



CORPUS CHRISTI PRODUCE COMPANY, INC.

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238 N. Port Ave, Corpus Christi, Texas 78408 www.ccproduce.com (361)884-4025



May is here and Artichokes are in season. Since Artichokes are a part of the thistle family of plant, they are often seen as prickly and intimidating. But if you give this unique vegetable a chance, it is really worth your while.

The name Artichoke comes from the word *articiocco*, which is most likely influenced by the word *ciocco*, meaning "stump." The Globe Artichoke, the kind most often eaten today, is from the thistle species, a group of flowering plants characterized by leaves with sharp prickles on their margins. Did you know that there are actually about 140 different Artichoke varieties? Of these 140, only 40 are grown commercially to be sold as food.

The edible portion of the Artichoke, usually called the "heart," is actually the bud of the Artichoke flower, formed before the flower begins to bloom. An Artichoke plant can grow to be six feet in diameter and three to four feet in height. When the plant flowers, it's about seven inches in diameter, and it has a vibrant violet-blue color. When the plant blooms, it's no longer edible and it becomes coarse, so this is why Artichokes are harvested and eaten before reaching this mature stage.

There are many health benefits to eating Artichoke. To start, they are full of wonderful vitamins and nutrients, including vitamin B12, K, and C, as well as magnesium, potassium, iron and zinc. Artichokes have amazing antioxidant power, which can combat free radicals and slow the onset of diseases that are often found in aging populations. Rutin, quercetin and gallic acid, found in Artichokes, have been found to reduce the growth of cancerous cells. They are also an excellent source of fiber, and can aide in healthy digestive functionality. Studies show that Artichokes can also help reduce the levels of bad cholesterol (LDL) and increase the levels of good cholesterol (HDL), which is great for cardiovascular health.



For a small percentage of people, Artichokes can cause some side effects, such as intestinal gas and allergic reactions to those who are allergic to plants like marigolds, ragweed, daisies and other similar plants and herbs. If you have allergies to any of these, be sure to check with your health care provider before taking Artichoke extract or eating Artichokes.

HOW TO PREPARE AN ARTICHOKE



1. Slice off the top of the artichoke: Slice about 3/4 inch to an inch off the tip of the artichoke. A serrated bread knife works great for this.

2. Cut off excess stem: Cut off excess stem, or if you wish, you may leave up to an inch on the Artichoke. The stems tend to be more bitter than the rest of the Artichoke, but some people like to eat them.

3. Remove choke inside: Using a spoon, scoop out the fuzzy choke and discard.

4. Cut off the tips of the petals: If the Artichokes have little thorns on the end of the petals, take a kitchen scissors and cut off the thorned tips of all of the petals. This step is mostly for aesthetics as the thorns soften with cooking and pose no threat to the person eating the Artichoke. Rub lemon on all cut parts of the Artichoke to prevent browning.

5. Rinse the Artichokes: Rinse the Artichokes in running cold water. While you rinse them, open up the petals a little so that the water does get inside more easily.

HOW TO STEAM ARTICHOSES

1. Fill a large stainless-steel or enameled pot with 1 inch of water.
2. Place a steamer basket inside the pot.
3. Bring the water to boiling.
4. Using tongs, place Artichokes, stem side down, in the basket.
5. Reduce heat to simmering, cover, and allow to steam about 20-25 mins. or until you can easily pull out a leaf from the center of Artichoke.



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