

GLOBE ARTICHOKEs

by Mike Mason

Most of you will have eaten globe artichokes and some readers may grow them. One eats the immature flower heads, scraping the flesh off the inside of each green “petal” then tackling the artichoke heart at the base. They are delicious served hot with melted butter or allowed to go cold and served with vinaigrette sauce.

I have grown them successfully since 1993. Firstly I purchased five rooted side shoots which had been detached from their parent plants. However, they all promptly died so that was a little disconcerting. I then tried growing them from seed and was successful – however about half the plants died each winter and I did not know why. I next purchased plants in pots. They were successful but again about half died each winter. Seeing as they are perennial and should last at least five years I concluded that I was doing something wrong. Hitherto I had grown them in the back garden - where they were very decorative - but I decided that my next small batch of seedlings would be planted on the allotment. The results were amazing. Instead of growing about 30 inches high they were over 60 inches high; great huge plants with many flower heads. The soil on my allotment, much better than that in the garden, must be ideal for globe artichokes.

Then I found the answer as to why I was losing half the plants each winter. I learnt that the roots cannot stand being soaked during the dormant period. So I covered the plants with clear polythene sheet from December to March to create a relatively dry zone and have not lost a plant since.

As for pests and diseases, I have had no trouble apart from an occasional attack by blackfly and their accompanying ants. The blackfly target the petals and careful cleaning is necessary before the artichokes are cooked.

Good gardening!

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