

# Jerusalem Artichokes

## Background

The Jerusalem Artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*) is a perennial plant which can reach a height of around 10 feet. Strangely, they are neither from Jerusalem, nor are they Artichokes! They are actually a member of the Sunflower family. The flowers - as such - do indeed look like small, yellow Sunflowers and the plants themselves are grown for their edible roots - or 'tubers'. They originate from North America, where they were first cultivated by Native Americans, long before Europeans inhabited the continent and sent samples back to France. This important root played a vital role in the diet of the North American natives and so caught the attention of the Europeans too.

Jerusalem Artichokes are known around the world under several different names, including Sunchokes, Sunroots, Earth Apples and Girasole.

The name 'Girasole' (Italian for Sunflower), which is what Italian immigrants in America called them, evolved into 'Jerusalem' over many, many years. They gained the 'Artichoke' part of their name because the French described them as similar in flavour to true Artichokes.

Jerusalem Artichokes are now popular in Europe and whilst their popularity in America had lost favour a little, it is now starting to increase again.





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## Cultivation

As a guide, Artichoke tubers should be planted at 0.5 tonnes (500Kg)/acre in rows spaced 36" apart. Plants should be spaced 18-24" in the rows. As an alternative, they can be broadcast and shallow ploughed in.

Other points to note, include:-

- The tubers are usually packaged in 25Kg potato bags.
- Normal Artichoke season runs from the middle of March, through April and possibly into May.
- These tubers are very prolific. If just a small piece is left in the ground, it will re-grow.
- They will grow in pretty much any soil types, all bar the most waterlogged. However, they will produce the biggest tubers and the best yield, if grown in free draining soil.

Once lifted, the tubers will only store for a couple of weeks, so it is wise to leave them in the ground for as long as possible.

