

Nine Artichoke Varieties (Savour #118)

by Karen Shimizu

Scores of different artichoke cultivars—encompassing a wide range of sizes, shapes, and colors—are available outside the United States. Here, by contrast, a single variety has dominated the market since the 1920s: the big, round California green globe. But in recent years California growers in the town of Lompoc, have started to change that. Since 1986, they have been developing domestic cultivars based on artichoke varieties commonly found in Italy and France. Some of the varieties that are grown work well as annuals, which are planted anew from seed each year and are not subject to the rigid spring–fall harvest cycle that governs perennials like the classic green globe, which comes from a single plant that is cultivated year after year.



1. Light red and only roughly one inch in diameter when fully grown, the purple **baby anzio** is a relative of the romanesco artichoke of the Lazio region of Italy. Like many baby artichokes, baby anzios can be cooked and eaten whole. (right)

2. Developed in the mid-1980s by a California grower named Rusty Jordan, the **big heart** is aptly named. It is endowed with a large, fleshy base and weighs in at over a pound. This green, 3 1/2–5 1/2" giant—the first patented annual artichoke grown from seed—is excellent for stuffing.

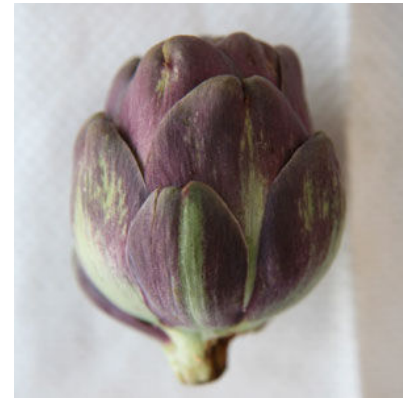


3. The **classic green globe**, (left) sometimes called just the globe, has a buttery-tasting heart and bottom and an ample amount of meat at the base of the petals. This artichoke, which ranges in size from three to five inches in diameter and was traditionally cultivated as a perennial, was originally brought to California from Italy but is similar in shape and flavor to the French camus de bretagne, a summer choke grown in Brittany.

4. The oblong **siena**, about four inches in diameter and born of a breeding program in central Italy, has a small choke and a wine red color. Slow to mature and still grown in relatively small quantities, this small artichoke usually weighs less than a pound and has a heart tender enough to be eaten raw.

5. The petite **mercury** (right), with its red-violet hue and distinctive rounded top, is sweeter than many other artichokes and is usually three and a half inches in diameter. Like the baby anzio, the mercury is derived from the Italian romanesco.

6. The dense and rotund **omaha** artichoke (up to six inches wide) owes its striking appearance to its sharply tapered red-and-green leaves. The omaha is less bitter than many artichoke varieties.



7. The two-inch-wide **fiesole** artichoke (right) has a fruity flavor and a deep wine color that does not fade with cooking. Bred from the violetta de provence, a purple variety native to southern France, the flesole has a comparatively tender stalk that can be quickly steamed and eaten.

8. The **chianti**, a classically shaped, four-inch-wide green artichoke with a touch of maroon on the leaves, also (like the mercury) traces its lineage to the iconic Italian romanesco.

9. The blocky and vividly colored **king** has distinctive green spots at the tips of its leaves. Usually four inches in diameter and bred from romanesco varieties mixed with other Italian artichoke strains, the king typically weighs more than a pound in peak season.



Grilled Baby Artichokes

Saveur #118 March 2009

SERVES 2

Whether cooked over coals or under a broiler, tender halved baby artichokes have a delicate yet concentrated flavor and a crisp exterior.

10 baby artichokes

1 lemon, halved

4 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

Sea salt, to taste

1. Prepare a medium-hot charcoal fire. Using a serrated-blade knife, halve artichokes lengthwise. Rub cut surfaces with half of the lemon. Transfer artichokes to a bowl and drizzle with 2 tbsp. oil. Season with salt and toss to coat. Transfer artichokes cut side down to the grill (alternatively, broil artichokes on a baking sheet placed in the middle of the oven). Cook, flipping once, until the bases of the artichokes are tender and the exterior is browned.

2. Using tongs, transfer artichokes to 2 plates. Drizzle artichokes with remaining oil and the juice of the remaining lemon half. Season with salt. Discard the first layer of leaves before eating, if you like.



Trimming Baby Artichokes

(Saveur #118)

by Ben Mims

Unlike European baby artichokes, which are harvested young, the vegetables that go by that name in America are simply smaller artichokes harvested at the same time and from the same plants as bigger ones. Clustered low on the stalk, shaded by the jumbo bulbs at the crown of the plant, these "baby" artichokes grow into mature, if petite, bulbs that remain relatively tender. Larger artichokes, such as globes, have not only woody outer leaves but also a fibrous choke that must be removed and discarded, while baby artichokes contain an edible choke (except those harvested very young, which have

no choke at all). Both the American and the European baby versions are perfect for simmering, or for sautéing. They're also great in stir-fries and used raw in salads. And as this step-by-step guide shows, these diminutive delights are exceptionally easy to trim and prepare for cooking.

1. Using a serrated-blade knife, cut off the spiky top third of a baby artichoke and discard the trimmings.
2. Pull back each dark outer leaf and snap it off at the base until you reach the tender, pale green inner leaves.
3. Use a vegetable peeler to remove the tough outer layers around the stem until you reach the pale layer underneath.
4. Leave the stem attached. With a paring knife, cut off the tough bottom 1/4" of the stem.
5. Use the paring knife to trim any remaining dark green or tough parts around the edge and underside of the artichoke and stem until it is smooth and uniformly pale in color.
6. The cleaned baby artichoke with its edible choke intact can be rubbed with the cut side of a lemon half and used immediately or stored, refrigerated, for up to two days in four cups of water mixed with the juice of two lemons, which will prevent browning.