

# Cardoon

*Cynara cardunculus* is a member of the Asteraceae (sunflower) family. Varieties include Plein Blanc Inorme and Italian Dwarf.

Closely related to the artichoke, cardoon is grown for its edible leaf petioles rather than for the undeveloped flower buds. The thistle-like plant grows vigorously, reaching a height of 3 to 5 feet and spreading to a diameter of 6 feet. It is a perennial plant native to the Mediterranean region, where it is widely grown.

## Market Information

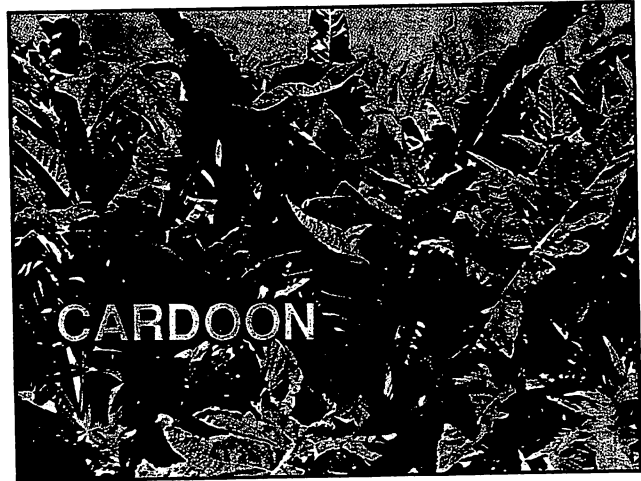
The harvested grouping of petioles looks like a large, waxy celery. Cardoon's flavor is similar to that of the artichoke: the cooked flesh is relatively bland, but alkaloids in its tissues can impart a bitter flavor.

**Use.** Young tender leaves, leaf petioles, and undeveloped tender flower stalks are edible. Grown in warm weather, these tissues can have a strong flavor. Cooking removes the bitter flavor (the alkaloids are destroyed by heating). A popular way to prepare cardoon is to steam or boil the young small leaves and tender stalks together. If you boil them, discard the water once it has drawn off the bitter flavor, and finish the boiling in a fresh pot of water. Cardoon can be used to flavor soups, chilled after cooking and served with a vinaigrette dressing, or prepared hot, topped with a cream sauce. Cardoon can also be marinated and eaten uncooked in salads. As "cardoni," it is a delicacy in some parts of Italy.

**Nutrition.** Cardoon contains 120 IU of Vitamin A, 2 mg of Vitamin C, 0.7 mg of protein, and 70 mg of calcium in a 100 g raw, edible portion (about ½ cup shredded).

## Culture

**Climatic requirements.** Botanists do not consider cardoon to be a cool-season crop, but it is cultivated as if it were. Cardoon will develop too much alkaloid and become inedible when grown in hot summertime conditions. The crop should be planted so it will develop and be harvested under moderately cool conditions. Cool temperatures ranging from 55° to 65°F are preferred. Freezing temperatures below 28°F will damage or kill aboveground parts of tender, non-acclimatized cardoon.



Cardoon grows to a height of 3 to 5 feet. (Photo: Hunter Johnson)

**Propagation and care.** Cardoon is commonly propagated from stem portions having axial buds or from suckers, which are rooted offshoots that develop on old stems and are then removed. Plants can also be produced from seed. Sow the seed indoors and transplant seedlings to the field when they are 3 to 4 inches tall. Place either transplants, seedlings, suckers, or stem portions 20 inches apart in rows 3 to 4 feet wide. If you are planting seed directly into the field, sow several seeds in clusters at 20-inch intervals in the row. Once the seedlings are established, thin each cluster to a single plant. With approximately 700 seeds per ounce, planting an acre of cardoon requires 4 to 5 pounds of seed.

Do not harvest cardoon in warm weather: the flavor will be bad. Suitable harvest dates are the same as those for artichoke. Like artichoke, cardoon is frost-sensitive.

Cardoon does best with rich, well-drained soil, plenty of water, and room to grow. Plants may require 6 months to reach full maturity. Reduce weed competition by weeding regularly. Two or three weeks before harvest, when the plants are approaching maturity, you can blanch the stalks to give the harvested produce a milder flavor. To blanch, tie the outer branches together about a foot

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from the top of the plant and wrap the base of the stalks with heavy paper, burlap, or other material to a height of 12 to 18 inches. Avoid covering the leaf tips. To harvest, cut the plants off below the

crown and peel away the coarse outside leaves. The product will resemble celery, and can be trimmed to a length of 12 to 16 inches. About 1 foot of tender stalk is usable.

### Sources

#### Seed

Epicure Seeds, Ltd., P.O. Box 450, Brewster, NY 10509

Exotica Seed Co., 8033 Sunset Boulevard, Suite 125, West Hollywood, CA 90046

Le Jardin du Gourmet, P.O. Box 75, St. Johnsbury Center, VT 05863

Nichols Garden Nursery, 1190 North Pacific Highway, Albany, OR 97321

Seeds Blüm, Idaho City Stage, Boise, ID 83706

#### More information

Glenn, Charlotte, and Georgeanne Brennan. 1988. *Le marché seeds international spring '88 catalog*. Dixon, CA.

Mansour, N. S. 1990. *Cardoon*. Vegetable Crops Recommendations, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR.

Rubatzky, Vincent. 1983. Grow cardoon for piquant flavor and beauty. University of California news release, June 24, 1983.

Rubatzky, Vincent, and Mas Yamaguchi. 1997. *World vegetables, 2d ed.* Chapman and Hall, New York, NY.

Stephens, James. *Minor vegetables*. 1988. Cooperative Extension Bulletin SP-40, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

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