

How do I use them?

With flavor like a sweet & nutty carrot, Sunchokes do not need to be peeled before using and may be eaten raw or cooked.

They may be sliced or grated into a salad or stir-fry, or even eaten out of hand like a carrot.

Since they cook very quickly, it is recommended they be steamed only briefly to retain their crisp texture.

They may be steamed whole as a side dish, or chopped and added to soups at the very beginning, where they will totally dissolve, thickening the soup, but without any starch.

Roasted Sunchokes

1 lb. sunchokes
1 to 2 tbs sunflower oil
salt and pepper
1 or 2 sprigs of Rosemary or Thyme (can also use dried herbs)

Heat oven to 400°. Toss sunchokes with oil and ½ tsp. salt. Bake in a shallow dish with herbs 20-30 minutes. They should be tender but firm. Season with pepper

Sauteed Sunchokes with sunflower seeds

1 lb. sunchokes
2 tbs. sunflower oil
3 tbs. roasted sunflower seed
2 tbs. chopped parsley
1 tsp. chopped thyme

Saute chokes in oil in lg skillet over high heat until lightly browned and tender, but still crisp. Taste as they cook—they can be done in 5-10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Add sunflower seed, parsley, and thyme and toss well.



WHERE TO FIND US

Newport Farmers' & Artisans' Market

Saturdays 9am–2pm. At the Paris Farmers Union parking lot, May - September.

Orono Farmers' Market

Saturdays 8am–1pm. Tuesdays 2–5:30 pm. At the UMO Steam Plant parking lot on College Ave.

Pittsfield Farmers' Market

Monday & Thursday, 2–6pm. At Hathorn Park across from Hartland Ave. (Rte 152).

Unity Farmers' Market

Saturday 9am–1pm. At the Community Center on Rt 139 (School St.).

Downtown Waterville Farmers' Market

Thursdays 2–6 pm. On the Concourse next to Main St.

At the Farm

Anytime we're not at market, stop by from 8am til dusk. From the Higgins Road, we are ½ mile down the Snakeroot Road on the right. The farm isn't visible from the road; look for our sign near the end of our driveway (which is called Organic Farm Road) heading into the woods.

We Grow...

...a wide variety of vegetables and herbs, garden seeds, seedlings and perennials. Our planting season begins in February to bring fresh greenhouse veggies to market in May. We also offer specialty items such as dried vegetables & herbs, and blooming lupines in pots.

Snakeroot Organic Farm

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Gardeners to the public since 1995.

Nova Scotia Redskin **Sunchokes**



from
**Snakeroot
Organic
Farm**

Sunchokes

What are they?

Sunchokes are a tuber (like a potato) that grows on a particular type of sunflower plant called *Helianthus tuberosus*, which is in the Daisy family (formerly Compositae, now Asteraceae). Sunchokes are also called by various other names: Canada potato, earth-apple, girasole, sunflower artichoke, sunroot, tuberous sunflower and Jerusalem artichokes.

The variety we grow was brought with us from a previous farm in 1995, where it was identified as “Nova Scotia Red” and has a red skin rather than the more common tan skin.

Where did they come from?

The ancestral sunchoke evolved along the eastern seaboard of North America, from the Gulf north up to Nova Scotia. Samuel de Champlain encountered sunchokes growing along with corn and beans in a Native American vegetable garden on what is now Cape Cod in 1605; he thought they tasted like artichokes, and the name apparently stuck. Native Americans called them sun roots; they are one of the many new-world foods the European settlers were given by the natives, and quickly became a colonial staple.

Once introduced to Europe, the tubers became popular there too. They were soon being sold in Paris, under the name topinambours tubers. (Six Brazilian Indians from the so-called Topinambours tribe had been brought back to France in 1613, and the tuber’s name was taken from them.) Today in Germany Topinambur spirits are distilled from fermented sunchoke tubers.

When cultivation of the plant had spread to Italy, arriving sometime before 1633, the Italians dubbed it the girasole, the “turn [gyre] to the sun [sol]” plant. It is generally believed that girasole was corrupted to “Jerusalem”, the “artichoke” part coming from Champlain’s early and ill-conceived comparison.

Sunchoke cultivation reached England in 1617, and Germany by 1632. An early edition of the Oxford English Dictionary mentioned “Artichocks of Jerusalem” in 1620.

Since their original flush of success in Europe, sunchokes have had an up-and-down history; it has been more down than up, owing to the immense popularity and success of that other new-world import, the potato, the two competing, basically, as a source of dietary starch. But the sunchoke persists, and from time to time enjoys a new flare of popularity.

Sunchokes’ carbohydrate content is entirely inulin (not starch), and are thus safe for diabetics to eat, but in many people inulin can cause some flatulence.

In recent years, there has been commercial interest in sunchokes as a source of fuel ethanol. The sugars from one acre of sunchokes can produce 500 gallons of ethanol, which is about double the amount produced by either corn or sugarbeet.

Growing Sunchokes.

Sunchokes prefer a rich, moist soil, but will do fine in almost any garden soil. You can even plant them directly into sod using a bulb planter, then mulching very heavily to suppress the sod. Compost or composted manure are also great “toppings” for this method of planting. Alternatively, you can plant sunchokes as you would plant potatoes.

Individual sunchoke plants are annuals, dying back after a few hard frosts, leaving the underground tubers to grow next year’s crop. However you should consider the sunchoke patch to be perennial, since no matter how thoroughly you sift through the soil to find every last tuber, you will miss enough to assure a thick growth sprouting up by mid-May. Be neat about digging them, too, tossing the soil back into the patch as you dig if you don’t want the patch to spread. Instead of pulling the stalks before digging, I use a set of hand pruners to cut off the stalks leaving a 2-3 inch stump to tell me where to dig. Then I

may safely use those stalks for mulch elsewhere with no fear of spreading the patch. In Maine sunchokes rarely produce seed; all propagation is done via the tubers.

A June thinning or two of the patch after a few years can be helpful to reduce plant population and thus increase tuber size. In fact, to eliminate the patch, just keep thinning until none are left, although you may have to do this two or three times during the summer. New tubers do not form until just before flowering in early October.

Sunchoke stems grow as tall as 12 feet, and are stout, rough, hairy, and rigid. Even a single row will create a view-blocking hedge from July to October. Branches vary from none to many. Nothing short of a tree can compete with them, but rabbits and pigs love both the tops and the tubers.

Leaves are 4 to 10 inches long and nearly heart-shaped with a broad oval base and pointed tip. The flowers of Black-eyed Susan are very similar in appearance and size to those of sunchokes.

How Many to Plant.

Tubers are usually 2"-4" long and 1½" in diameter. Plant one tuber or partial tuber per foot (1 foot spacing). If planting more than one row, make the rows three feet apart. That will be sufficient to allow the plants to shade the rows and keep the weeds out. Three pounds will plant one row, approximately 12'–15' long and produce about a 5 gallon bucket full of tubers. Plant either whole tubers or cut into chunks with one or two eyes. It is common to dig half your ‘chokes in fall, and the other half in early spring, since the ground is the best place to store them.

Once harvested keep them in a plastic bag in a cold place, the colder the better, just above freezing. Can also be frozen whole and raw.

Tubers sprout in late spring and are capable of forming shoots even if buried 12 inches deep in soil. As many as 6 shoots may emerge from one tuber.