

Helianthus tuberosus

[Synonyms : *Helianthus tomentosus*, *Helianthus tuberosus* var. *subcanescens*]

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE is a perennial. Native to North America (particularly around the Canadian lakes) it has sunflower-like, yellow flowers.

It is also known as Artichoke, *Articiok* (Maltese), *Artisiog Jerwsalem* (Welsh), Canada potato, Canadian potato, Earth apple, *Elianto tuberoso* (Italian), *Erdbirne* (German), *Girasole*, *Girassol-batateiro* (Portuguese), *Hathichuk* (Hindi), *Helianto tubera* (Esperanto), Indian potato, *Jerusalem-Artischocke* (German), Jerusalem red root, *Jordärtskocka* (Swedish), *Kisu-sit* (Pawnee North American Indian tribe), *Knollensonnenblume* (German), *Knollige Sonnenblume* (German), *Maa-artisokka* (Finnish), *Pagi* (Dakota North American Indian tribe), *Pahe* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian tribe), *Pahi* (Winnebago North American Indian tribe), *Pataca* (Spanish), *Patata americana* (Italian), *Patata de Caña* (Spanish), *Pera di terra* (Italian), Pig nut, *Seeb-zameeni* (Persian), *Slnečnica* (Slovak), *Slunečnice topinambur* (Czech), Sunchoke, Sunflower artichoke, *Süsskartoffel* (German), *Tartoufa* (Arabic), *Tartufo* (Italian), *Topinambour* (French), *Topinambur* (German), *Topinambur hlíznatý* (Czech), *Tupinambo* (Spanish), *Weisswurz* (German), *Yildiz koku* (Turkish), and Wild sunflower.

Warning – authorities note that jerusalem artichoke can be potentially poisonous.

Tuberosus means ‘tuberous’ with reference to the roots.

The French, who introduced the jerusalem artichoke to Europe in 1616, named the plant *topinambour*, the name of a small tribe in Brazil that had no relevance to the plant’s origins. (Some authorities describe how six Indians from this Brazilian tribe had been brought to France in 1613 to the great fascination of those who met them and claim that their newsworthiness made their tribal name the perfect basis for a name for the new vegetable in the eyes of those promoting it.) The English common name Jerusalem artichoke is a conundrum. The ‘Jerusalem’ has nothing whatsoever to do with Israel or Palestine, and ‘artichoke’ does not come from the English words ‘choke’ or ‘heart’ or the Latin word for ‘garden’ *hortus*, nor even from one of its other French names *artichaut* (which, itself, has nothing to do with the French words *chou*, meaning ‘cabbage’, or *chaud* meaning ‘hot’). Some authorities believe Jerusalem artichoke to be a corruption of the plant’s old Italian name *girasola articiocco* which would translate as ‘sunflower artichoke’. *Girasola* means ‘turning to the sun’ and *articiocco* is the old northern Italian word (today replaced with *carciofo*) which, via the Spanish, is derived from the Arabian name *Al-Kharshuf*. The similarity in taste between the underground stems of the jerusalem artichoke when it was introduced to Europe and the fleshy base of the flower of the artichoke itself (often referred to as Globe artichoke, *Cynara scolymus*), which had been familiar to the Mediterranean and Europe for centuries, led to the adoption of the English name Artichoke for the new arrival in the Old World. While other authorities recall that it was French explorers who came across jerusalem artichokes in 1605 in Massachusetts where they were being grown by North American Indians of Nausett Harbour, Cape Cod. Among the French contingent was Samuel de Champlain (1567-1635), often referred to today as the ‘Founder of Canada’ and he was destined to come across these roots again, eleven years later, further north in Canada. Certainly on the

latter occasion, if not the first, he sent some samples back to France. By 1618 they were being peddled on the streets of Paris under the name by which they are known there today *topinambour*.

Champlain recorded a description of the edible roots 'with their taste of artichokes' as a comparison with the bottoms of European globe artichokes, a view some would dispute. The confusion caused by its common name has of late even led to suggestions of alternatives, such as 'root-artichoke' or even 'sun-root'. But it is surmised that no attempt has actually been made to encourage the adoption of these in preference to that established and generally accepted, even if it is a misunderstood misnomer.

Although the Pawnee tribe consumed the tubers raw other North American Indians tribes, such as Chippewa, Hopi, Winnebago, Iroquois, Micmac, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Malecite, Dakota, Potawatomi and Ponca ate them boiled or roasted as well. For the Huron Indians though, and even parts of the Dakota tribe, the tubers were definitely emergency rations.

Some authorities suspect that the pair of roots received in 1617 by John Goodyer (1592-1664), who among other things assisted in preparing an edition of John Gerard's herbal, may have been the first jerusalem artichoke plants to reach England. By 1629 jerusalem artichokes (the roots) are said to have been quite popular with the English and easily obtainable in London. But their popularity – in Europe as a whole – waned as the potato's (*Solanum tuberosum*) lure increased, and it was not until the famine caused by the potato blight (which hit crops in both North America and Europe to varying degrees in 1845 and 1846) that any constructive effort was made to revive enthusiasm. Even then it was without any significant lasting success. Overall the tuberous roots continued to assume a famine-food role (as in Egypt and parts of Africa today) apart from a brief respite in some European countries where it was not subject to food rationing during World War II.

Apart from a cooked vegetable it can also be an ingredient in pickles, relishes and diabetic dishes. In recent years jerusalem artichoke has gained considerable popularity as a slimming aid despite the fact that it can cause wind.