

Artichoke, Jerusalem—*Helianthus tuberosus* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

The Jerusalem artichoke is a tuberous rooted perennial better adapted to the northern parts of the United States than to Florida. Various American Indians grew it for centuries as a staple food. They referred to it as girasole, while the French prefer to call it topinambour. The plant is also known as sunchoke since its small yellow flowers resembles those of its close relative, the sunflower. Do not confuse it with the globe artichoke of which the edible bud is a gourmet's delight.

Although the Jerusalem artichoke is not as well adapted to Florida as to other parts of the country, it is grown satisfactorily in gardens around the state. Planting stock is difficult to maintain through our warm winters.

Description

The plant grows up to 10 feet tall, becomes quite bushy, and produces yellow flowers. The mature tubers resemble knobby, new Irish potatoes in appearance and are up to 3 to 4 inches long and half as thick. Several tubers are produced in the ground at the base of the woody, rough-textured stems. Young, immature tubers first appear as white, elongated, tender roots. Although a perennial crop by nature, it is grown as an annual.



Figure 1. Jerusalem artichoke
Credits: Blue Goose Inc.



Figure 2. Jerusalem artichoke
Credits: James M. Stephens

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Culture and Use

Propagation is very similar to that for Irish potatoes, and the tubers are used similarly. Since they contain a high content of fructose and low starch, diabetic patients have sought them as a health food; however, this should not be interpreted as a recommendation.

Varieties

Most U.S. catalogs list it by its common name. The best-known variety in Florida is the 'French Mammoth White,' but there are several diverse varieties coming from Europe. Some are tall, others short, and some have lots of flowers, while some have few. Other varieties grown are 'Fuseau' (long 1-inch diameter tubers); 'Smooth Garnet' (red-skinned); and 'Golden Nugget' (good slicing type).