

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

www.grannyearth.com



Jerusalem Artichoke

Ask Granny Earth

I've been growing Jerusalem Artichokes for many years. My wife and I have found many ways to prepare them and eat them on a regular basis. I have heard that they have many good health benefits. What do you know?

Jerusalem Artichoke - (*Helianthus tuberosus*) is not from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a corruption of the Italian '*girasola*' meaning toward the sun, a reference to the sunflower. Artichoke comes from the Arabic word, '*al-khurshuf*' meaning thistle, a reference to the appearance of the above ground foliage. The name *Helianthus* comes from the Greek word '*helios*', meaning sun and *tuberosus* is the Latin word for 'producing tubers'. Its nickname is Sunchoke, or Sunroot- it is native to North America. Indians prepared the tubers for Lewis and Clark during their expedition through North Dakota in 1805. They provided them with much needed carbohydrates and were a staple in their diet.

Sunchoke is a perennial, growing to heights of 7 –10 feet and having yellow sunflower-like flowers. The edible tubers are elongated, knobby, white, red or purple skinned. Several tubers are clustered at the base of each stem. They are very high in inulin, a fructose polysaccharide and can be eaten raw, or cooked- the flavor improves if they are left in the ground until frosted.

Everyone that I have talked to about Sunchoke, reiterates the fact that they spread profusely - like a weed! Like so many of the 'weeds' that our Creator provided, this plant has medicinal qualities, that if we would only learn to use them, we could heal ourselves. Some medicinal properties of this plant are: appetite suppressant, immune stimulant, **anti-diabetic**, anti-hypoglycemic - **stabilizes blood glucose** and improves bacteria ecology in the colon.

Many physicians of the mainstream allopathic medicine field are beginning to recommend this tuber to their patients for a variety of ailments- its becoming that popular. The carbohydrate in Sunchoke is inulin, not starch. This inulin breaks down into fructose when eaten. Fructose is considered a better sugar for most diabetics because it must be converted to glucose before being absorbed by the cells.

The following info was gleaned from 2000 Healthnotes, Inc. at www.healthnotes.com - "Fructo-oligosaccharides (FOS), which is the scientific name for inulin, consist of short chains of fructose molecules. When FOS (inulin) is eaten in such foods as Sunchoke tubers, they are only partially digested. The undigested portion serves as food for 'friendly' bacteria (in our gut), such as Bifidobacteria and Lactobacillus species. Clinical studies have shown that FOS (inulin) can increase the number of friendly bacteria in the colon while simultaneously reducing the population of harmful bacteria. Other benefits noted were increased production of beneficial short-chain fatty acids, increased absorption of calcium and magnesium and improved elimination of toxic compounds."

Experimental studies are showing a benefit in lowering blood sugar levels in people with **diabetes** and in reducing elevated blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Several double-blind studies have shown that in individuals with type 2-diabetes, inulin (FOS, 8 grams per day for two weeks) significantly lowered fasting blood-sugar levels and serum total-cholesterol levels. Still other studies have shown that in individuals with elevated total cholesterol triglyceride levels, FOS or inulin produced significant reductions in triglyceride levels. As with many other medicinal plants, there still needs to be more studies done in order to provide the medical community with the proof that it needs, to understand the healing properties of Sunchoke.

The white pulp of the tuber is crisp and sweet, healthful and delicious. It can be prepared like potatoes, eaten raw, or pickled. Slices of the tubers can be added to your favorite recipe for vegetable soup for a delicious change.

People who are invalids especially enjoy them, because this food is easily digested. Its carbohydrate, inulin is not starch - an advantage in low starch diets. Some people may have a temporary side-effect of 'flatulence' until the system adjusts to the reaction in gut.

Since diabetes is a metabolic disease that involves proteins, carbohydrates and fats, supporting the proper function of the digestive system would seem like a wise move.