

UNH Cooperative Extension Info Line Question of the Week

Jerusalem Artichokes

Q. My neighbor gave me some Jerusalem Artichokes. What do I do with them?



Answer. Jerusalem artichokes, also called sun chokes, are sold in markets as a gourmet vegetable. Native to North America, Jerusalem artichokes were eaten by Native Americans long before European settlers arrived. The explorer Samuel de Champlain took Jerusalem artichokes back to France in 1605; by the mid-1600s they were widely used across Europe as both a human food and livestock feed.

Typically harvested in late fall, Jerusalem artichokes have a crispness that resembles water chestnuts and a sweet, nutty flavor. The edible portion is the tuber, the swollen portion found at the end of underground stems. Leaving tubers in the soil as late as possible before digging increases their sweetness. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of sun chokes is that 75 to 80% of their carbohydrate comes in the form of a unique sugar called inulin. The body metabolizes inulin more slowly than other sugars which makes them a preferred food for diabetics.

Jerusalem artichokes can be eaten in a variety of ways. They can be cut into matchsticks for salads or slaw, grated for use in “potato” pancakes, cut into slices and baked, stir fried, steamed or boiled. The options are almost endless.

A member of the sunflower family, Jerusalem artichokes are easy to grow. If you like them, ask your neighbor for a few tubers in the spring. Plant them in a sunny location with a well-drained, slightly alkaline soil, water when it’s dry, and harvest in late fall. Beware: any small tubers left in the ground will sprout the following spring. If you don’t keep a close eye on your sun chokes, they can turn into a weed.