



**UConn**  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE,  
HEALTH AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES

PLANT SCIENCE AND LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTURE

UConn Home and Garden Education  
Center  
U-4115, 1380 Storrs Road  
Storrs, CT 06269-4115  
877-486-6271

[www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu)  
[uconnladybug.wordpress.com](http://uconnladybug.wordpress.com)

## The Jerusalem Artichoke: Something New for Next Year's Garden?

By Joan Allen

If you're a gardener who likes to grow new vegetables, use native plants or support beneficial insects season-long, the Jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*) might be fun to try. As a member of the sunflower genus, this plant produces tall stems topped with bright yellow flowers. There are a few different theories on the origin of the name, which is a curiosity since it's native to eastern North America. The most popular seems to be that 'Jerusalem' is an American twist on the Italian 'girasole' meaning 'turning to the sun'. Other common names include sunchoke, earth apple or topinambour (French).



Plants reach a height of 5-10 feet and produce flowers from August to October, providing a nice source of pollen and nectar for beneficial insects late in the season. The plants are sturdy and rather coarse. Leaves are 4-10" long, thick and rough, and have toothed edges. They are opposite on the lower stem and alternate above. Flowers are 3" across.

This plant will do well in gardens in the northern two thirds of the eastern United States and tolerates a wide range of soil types and pH, although a bit alkaline is preferred. Soil should be well drained. A consistent water supply is especially important as the tubers (edible part) develop late in the summer. This is a VERY prolific plant. According to one reference, a single root can produce as many as 75-200 new tubers in a single year. On top of that, the plant is perennial and tends to spread, so it can become a bit of a problem in limited spaces if not kept in check. The best way to do that is to remove unwanted volunteer plants each year before they produce tubers.

The edible part of the plant, as noted, is a tuber formed below ground. Tubers are generally elongate but can be knobby and irregular in shape. Size averages about 3-4" long by 1-2" thick. The color varies from white to shades of brown, pink and red. There are a number of different cultivars available for garden use. Tubers form late in the season and should not be harvested until after the first frost for the sweetest flavor. The flavor has been compared to that of the true artichoke, hence the common name. The texture raw is crisp-tender like a water chestnut and can be a nice addition to a salad. Jerusalem artichokes can be used like potatoes in cooking, becoming soft when boiled or steamed. They can also be roasted.



A word of caution should be shared regarding the consumption of Jerusalem artichokes. Apparently, they result in excessive flatulence and sometimes abdominal discomfort in some people, especially when eaten raw. This is because the main carbohydrate in the tubers is inulin instead of starch and the digestive process differs. Many people report little or no effect, so it appears to vary depending on your system. On the plus side, Jerusalem artichokes are a good source of potassium, iron, fiber, niacin, thiamine, phosphorus and copper.

Historically, Native Americans used the tubers as a food source and introduced them to the Pilgrims, for whom they became a staple. The French explorer Champlain brought tubers back to France where they became widely used for both human and livestock food. The French also produce wine and beer from the tubers.

I'd recommend looking for Jerusalem artichoke at your favorite grocery or produce market and trying some before you invest your garden space in them. That way you'll know ahead of time whether they agree with you gastrically. They will definitely be fun to grow if you keep them corralled. Another good point: they have few pest and disease problems.