

By Janel Martin

Would you like to offer your CSA customers additional choices? Perhaps you want to set yourself apart at the farmer's market by offering a desirable high-end food product. Have you ever considered globe artichokes? Yes, they can be grown in New England as a perennial crop with the use of low tunnels. I collaborated with Joan Jackson of 4J's Earthworks to conduct an experiment with a grant from Northeast SARE to investigate wintering over globe artichokes using low tunnels and chopped straw mulch.

Complete details of the project can be found on the NE SARE website. Here is the brief run-down of what we discovered. The best varieties overall were Imperial Star, Green Globe and Opera due to high germination rate and yield. The growing site is very important for winter survivability, we found a dramatic difference between the growing areas at the farm, and the plot located in the most well drained location on the farm, performed the best, and in the future that location will be expanded to grow more plants. Overall 48% of the plants survived the winter with the low tunnel covered with Agribon+ AG-70 and chopped straw mulch.

Some of the highlights of using globe artichokes as a perennial crop were that once they were established in the beds they need very little in the way of inputs. The plants have very long taproots so no supplemental water was needed after the plants were established. In the second year, weed pressure was reduced due to the chopped straw left from wintering was spread around the ground in the planting bed, this did a great job of suppressing the weeds.

The results from the project are promising, and we believe with a few adjustments that this system can be a viable option for a farm looking to diversify their crop. Changes for next year include more rodent control, pulling mulch away from the base of plants earlier in the spring upon uncovering, and intermixing annual and perennial globe artichokes to have a longer harvest window. The project also increased the sales of globe artichoke seedlings from the retail garden center division, since we were able to show customers the living proof that the plants could survive. We also had interest from local chefs who wanted to feature locally grown globe artichokes on their menus.



We were not able to do a year to year comparison between varieties due to a mix up in the marking stakes during mulching. We are able to state that the plants that produced a yield the first year also produced the second year. Going forward we would not continue to grow the two varieties with large spine, they did not produce well as an annual, had a germination rate below 20% and the spines on the leaves and buds made management difficult. We compiled a list of varieties for comparison (Table 1).

Table 1: Seven varieties grown, where they were purchased, their yield as an annual plant and some of the attributes we found most useful.

| Variety | Supplier | 2014 yield | Attributes |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------|--|
| Imperial Star | Johnney's Selected Seed | 13.5 kg | no spines, compact buds, good germination rate |
| Opera | Johnney's Selected Seed | 11.3 kg | no spines, good germination rate, attractive color |
| Green Globe | Territorial Seeds | 6.6 kg | small spines, unique globe shape, tight bud, moderate germination rate |
| Emerald | Territorial Seeds | 5.6 kg | no spines, compact buds, moderate germination rate |
| Violetto | Territorial Seeds | 1.7 kg | small spines, attractive color, good germination, attracted aphids |
| Romanesco | NE Seeds | 6.7 kg | sharp spines, many plants did not produce in annual crop, low germination rate |
| Caciofo Di Chiogga | NE Seeds | 0.5 kg | sharp spines, only one plant produced annual crop, very low germination rate |

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