

## Globe Artichoke

As hard as it may be to believe, this rather spiky member of the milk thistle family was traditionally believed to be a powerful aphrodisiac in Europe and consequently denied to women altogether lest they be led astray. Men and Kings however, enjoyed the artichoke with gusto until a 14 year old Catherine de Medici married King Henry II and refused to stop eating her favorite food in plain view of the whole court!

From a modern naturopathic perspective however, we can speculate that any reported aphrodisiac effects were probably brought about somewhat indirectly through an overall increase in health. The primary action of many thistles in herbal medicine including artichoke is upon the liver and gallbladder, and any medicine which can unburden these overloaded organs in an extravagant aristocracy is bound to result in an increase in vitality and consequently libido.

In herbal medicine systems all over the world where it is employed, artichoke is used to increase bile production in the liver, increase the flow of bile from the gallbladder, and to increase the contractive power of the bile duct. These bile stimulatory actions are beneficial in a wide range of digestive, gallbladder, and liver disorders and can also be used to mobilize fatty stores in the liver and detoxify it. In Turkey for example, artichoke decoctions are used as blood cleansers by detoxifying the liver which then in turn cleanses the skin. Turkish herbalists also consider the artichoke to be the ideal remedy for hepatitis. In Brazilian herbal medicine systems, leaf preparations are similarly used for liver and gallbladder problems, but also diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, anemia, diarrhea, fevers, ulcers, and gout. In Europe, not only is it also used for liver and gallbladder disorders, but in several countries, standardized herbal drugs are manufactured and sold as prescription drugs for high cholesterol.

Science has attributed this action to a compound found within the artichoke called cynarin and in the 1970s, European scientists first documented cynarin's ability to lower cholesterol in humans. A more recent study published in 2000 used an artichoke leaf extract that was standardized to its cynarin content, and for six weeks, 143 patients with high cholesterol were given the extract. At the end of the test, results showed an impressive decrease of 10%-15% in total cholesterol, ( both LDL and HDL). These properties make artichoke once again an ideal remedy for the modern era as our livers are increasingly overburdened with a cocktail of industrial chemicals, preservatives and additives from the non-organic food industry. Be warned however, for the cynarin found in artichokes also briefly transforms the taste buds so that everything consumed following tastes perceptibly sweeter. Perhaps this is its true aphrodisiac effect, but the only scientific way to confirm this is to buy your lover an organic artichoke and experiment for yourselves!

Enjoy!

- The Barefoot Doctor