

# Cardoon

*Cynara cardunculus*



*Perennial herbaceous plant.  
Prosperes in coastal zones with mild,  
nearly frost-free winters; can be grown  
as an annual in cold winter areas.*

*Grow from seed or  
containerized seedlings.*

*Plant with a wire basket to protect from  
ravenous gophers.*

*Provide rich, well-drained soil.*

*Fertilize and water regularly.*

*Cut dead foliage back to soil each fall  
and mulch heavily in cold winter areas.*

Cardoon, or *cardi* in Italian, is a little-known vegetable in America, but one no self-respecting Italian gardener could do without. Its prolific silver-blue foliage, which spews forth like a seven-foot-tall fountain flash-frozen in all its majesty, makes a sensational addition to any yard. A relative of the artichoke plant, cardoon grows with more vigor, more height, and more drama than its kin. While the foliage dies back to the ground each fall, each spring a rapid renewal of growth bursts forth from the massive, fibrous root system.

The typical cardoon flower stalk can reach well over seven feet and is covered with a dozen or more flower heads that resemble small, woody globe artichokes. The flowers, which are inedible, share the same vibrant purple of an uneaten artichoke blossom. Do not let the flowers set mature seed, as cardoon can become an invasive plant from wind-blown seed. Cardoon is best placed in the mid to deep background of a planting so its tall, imposing foliage doesn't overwhelm smaller plants. Display the silver leaves next to a dark green plant such as sweet bay or rosemary.