



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

May 13-14, 2016

Sunchokes...A Vegetable with Unique Characteristics!

by Andrea Yoder

I admit, I didn't have a clue what a sunchoke was when I first started cooking at Harmony Valley Farm. I only knew I was hungry for the exploration of new vegetables and embraced the challenge of cooking with the seasons. Within the first few weeks I was here, I made a delicious sunchoke chive soup and crispy roasted sunchoke with chili & lime that I served for crew lunch (both recipes are on our website). It didn't take long for Richard to pull me aside and gently request that I lay off on the sunchoke for crew lunches. That's when he explained the beauty of a sunchoke to me. Some people love them and others are not quite as fond of them for reasons I'll explain in just a bit. But first, let's explore the basic of sunchoke.



Sunchokes are a tuber that grows underground on a plant in the sunflower family. They are native to North America and were actually an important food for our early ancestors who called them sun roots. In fact the Effigy Mound Builders who lived on our land 1500 years ago grew and ate sunchoke! The other name they are most commonly known by is Jerusalem Artichoke. This is a bit misleading as sunchoke don't have anything to do with Jerusalem or globe artichokes!

Richard started growing sunchoke in his quest to grow as many seasonal vegetables as possible in a Wisconsin growing season. Sunchoke help us push the limits on our season both as a late fall harvested crop as well as a spring-dug crop. The stalks of the plant grow to an impressive 10-12 feet tall and when in bloom with yellow sunflowers, the field is a work of art. Most varieties of sunchoke don't even start developing much for tubers until after the first frost in late fall. After the first frost they are able to translocate the energy stored in the stalk to the base of the plant for the purpose of developing the tubers. Sunchoke are

cold hardy and, as long as the ground isn't frozen, can be harvested very late into the fall. In fact, last year we did our final harvest in December! Sunchoke are one of a handful of crops we are able to overwinter in the ground and harvest in the spring. In fact they continue to grow slowly and are actually larger in the spring. Sunchoke also store very well throughout the winter which is just one more reason why sunchoke are a good fit for a seasonal Midwestern locavore's diet.

Sunchokes are a tasty vegetable with a crisp, crunchy texture and a thin skin. They have a mild, pleasant, slightly sweet and nutty flavor. They can be eaten raw or cooked, and peeling is a matter of choice. When cooked, keep in mind that anything you can do with a potato you can do with a sunchoke. Sunchoke make excellent smooth soups and are delicious when roasted. Because of their high water content, roasting makes them fluffy on the inside and crisp on the outside. Sunchoke can also be stir-fried, pan-fried, added to stews and eaten raw in salads.

Sunchokes are really a pretty cool vegetable that are quite tasty. Now, here's where I need to interject an important point. Sunchoke contain a non-digestible fiber called inulin. Some people may experience abdominal discomfort, gas and bloating if they eat too many sunchoke at a time. There are some individuals who have a bad impression of sunchoke because no one ever told them that they may be best consumed in small quantities. As a result they may have eaten too much and experienced some digestive discomfort that they have not yet forgotten. In fact, Richard and I have our own sunchoke stories that led us to form a pact upon which we agreed that despite the fact that we grow them, we never have to feel obligated to eat sunchoke. Within the last year I've noticed their popularity amongst chefs really opening up. I started to think maybe I was missing out on something by choosing not to eat sunchoke. So, after many years of not eating them, I cooked them again and realized how much I really do like their taste! I also did a little more research about inulin and realized I am

This Week's Box

OVERWINTERED PARSNIPS: For a quick side dish, sauté thinly sliced parsnips along with green onion, salt and pepper. Simple and sweet!

OVERWINTERED SUNCHOKES: See the main article in this week's newsletter for more information.

RHUBARB: Please note, our rhubarb suffered some damage in a hail storm we had last week. You may see some surface scarring but this should not affect the use of the rhubarb. For a refreshing cocktail try a Rhubarb Bellini, the recipe can be found on our website.

NETTLES-Yes, they sting: Please refer to our newsletter from last week for handling and use instructions. Add cooked, chopped nettles to your scrambled eggs or frittata.

WILD RED KALE: Sauté sliced green garlic and kale in a small amount of oil then add a handful of dried cranberries and top with toasted pine nuts.

GREEN GARLIC AND EGYPTIAN WALKING ONIONS: These two vegetables look very similar in appearance. You can tell them apart by looking at their green tops. The green garlic has flat greens and the onion greens are more round. The greens and bulbs of both the garlic and onions are edible.

CHIVES: Chop the chives and add to sour cream or plain yogurt with minced green garlic and green onions for a fresh tasting potato topping or dip. The longer it is chilled the better it tastes, so make it in advance and let it chill ahead of using it.

ASPARAGUS: For a quick appetizer, wrap asparagus spears in bacon and bake in oven until the bacon is golden.

SORREL: This refreshing little green has a citrus flavor to it. Slice it thinly and add it to any fresh greens salad or add a handful to your morning smoothie.

CHOICE-DECORATIVE WILLOW: We trimmed these decorative branches from our field hedges. They are an important part of our farm ecosystem, and we hope you enjoy their beauty in your home!

missing out on some important health benefits by choosing to exclude sunchokes from my diet.

Ok, so lets talk a little bit about inulin and why it's good for our bodies. Inulin is a non-digestible fiber known as a prebiotic nutrient. Many of you are probably familiar with probiotics which are beneficial bacteria that live in our digestive tract and contribute in positive ways to our health and well-being. Probiotic bacteria are found in fermented foods such as sauerkraut, yogurt, kefir, etc. They help maintain good digestive health by keeping our digestive bacterial populations in check and preventing the overgrowth of bad bacteria that can make us ill and inhibit proper digestion. Probiotic bacteria do many other amazing things for our body, so don't be misled by this very simple explanation of their function. Prebiotics, such as inulin, actually serve as an important food source for probiotic bacteria with most of their work taking place in our large intestines. Essentially, prebiotics are fertilizer for beneficial bacteria in our gut. There are many benefits that stem from the synergistic effects of consuming prebiotics and supporting healthy bacterial populations throughout the digestive tract. Some of the benefits include improved nutrient absorption, enhanced immunity, and better digestion which is important as a basis for our overall health and well-being. The bacteria in our large intestines in particular use inulin as a food source which helps them thrive and keep healthy populations. Unfortunately the good bacteria produce gas as a product of their digestion and that is where we have the potential to develop symptoms of gas and bloating if we eat too many at one time.

So after learning more about the health benefits of sunchokes, I decided to change my tune and figure out what an appropriate serving size is for my body. I've learned that I can comfortably consume about a ¼ cup portion. So that led me to rethink how I'm using sunchokes in my cooking. For those of us who need to consume them in smaller quantities, we have to find ways to eat them more like a condiment instead of the main ingredient. By approaching sunchokes this way, we get to enjoy the taste of the sunchoke as well as their health benefits without experiencing any discomfort. The good news is that sunchokes do store very well, so if it takes you a month or two to eat a pound of sunchokes it's no big deal.

Here are a few ideas to get you started. First, check out the recipe for Chile & Lime Sunchoke Salsa in this week's newsletter. It's super-simple to make and very tasty. It can be eaten in small quantities as a condiment to top off tacos, seared fish, chicken and pork, or added to salads or sandwiches in quantities of just 1-2 tablespoons at a time. Here's another idea, the next time you are cooking a burger, add a few slices of thinly sliced sunchokes to the pan and fry them until golden and slightly crispy and add them to your sandwich. One of my favorite ways to eat sunchokes is by simply roasting them. A portion of roasted sunchokes may not be a good idea, but why not mix them in with other root vegetables such as carrots, parsnips and potatoes? You can spin-off on

the idea of roasted vegetables by making sunchoke croutons to eat on a green salad. Cut the sunchokes into small cubes, toss with olive oil and season to your liking with salt, pepper and maybe a few pinches of smoked paprika or garlic powder. Roast until golden and crispy. You can also shred sunchokes and mix them with potatoes or sweet potatoes to make potato pancakes or hash browns. I mentioned earlier that you can stir-fry sunchokes as well. If you add a small handful to a stir-fry near the end of cooking, they'll retain their crispiness and will taste similar to a water chestnut. Lastly, add diced or shredded sunchokes to quiche, frittatas or egg casseroles.

For those of you who may be trying sunchokes for the first time, I hope you enjoy your first taste of them and find simple ways to include them in your meals. If you have tried sunchokes previously and (like me) have been avoiding them, I hope you'll reconsider ways you might include sunchokes in your diet again. And as a side note.....Farmer Richard has also reconsidered his avoidance of sunchokes and has willingly been eating and enjoying sunchokes again with no negative recourse.



Chile and Lime Sunchoke Salsa by Chef Andrea Yoder

Yield: 1 Cup
8 oz sunchokes (about 4 medium tubers)
4 green onions
3 Tbsp lime juice
¼ tsp chili powder
2 tsp honey
Salt and black pepper, to taste

1. Shred the sunchokes using a food processor or a grater. Place shredded sunchokes in a medium mixing bowl.
2. Separate the green tops from the base of the onion. Finely mince the white portion of the onion. Thinly slice the green portion. Add both the green and white of the onion to the sunchokes.
3. Add the lime juice, chili powder and honey. Season with salt and pepper and stir to combine. Refrigerate for at least 20 minutes before serving. Prior to serving, adjust seasoning as needed with lime juice, salt and pepper.

Serving Suggestions for Chile & Lime Sunchoke Salsa:

- This salsa is an excellent topping for tacos or quesadillas.
- Serve on top of seared fish and grilled chicken or pork.
- To make a quick salad, toss a few tablespoons of the salsa with spinach and chunks of avocado. Top with cooked chicken or fish if desired.
- Use this salsa as a garnish for creamy soups such as corn chowder.

