

Artichoke Leaf and Powder Profile

Also known as

Cynara scolymus

Introduction

The artichoke is one of the world's oldest vegetables. It was first grown in eastern Africa and then made its way to Europe via Egypt. Images of artichokes are found on ancient Egyptian papyri and on sacrificial altars. The ancient Romans discovered that artichoke leaf was valuable as a digestive aid, making it a "noble" vegetable only to be consumed by the nobility and rich.

Constituents

Cynarin, beta-sitosterol, luteolin, stigmasterol.

Parts Used

Dried leaf, rather than the flowering buds eaten as a vegetable.

Typical Preparations

Powdered leaves made into a capsule, the dried leaf as a tea, in liquid extract form and the pressed juice of the fresh plant.

Summary

In Europe, where artichoke leaf has a long history as an herbal medicine, vague digestive symptoms are commonly attributed to inadequate flow of bile from the gallbladder. Evidence tells us that artichoke leaf does indeed stimulate the gallbladder, and the release of bile counteracts excessive stomach acids or excessive fats to cure bloating, belching, and gas. Artichoke leaf may lower cholesterol, but, unlike statin drugs, it will not lower cholesterol below healthy levels. In a clinical study involving volunteers who had high cholesterol, artichoke leaf lowered total cholesterol 18.5% as compared to 8.6% in the placebo group; LDL cholesterol by 23% vs. 6%; and LDL-to-HDL ratios by 20% vs. 7%. In a follow-up study with volunteers who already had healthy cholesterol, it had no effect.

Precautions

Don't use artichoke leaf if you have gallstones. Safety in pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children under the age of 12 has not been established.