

## Artichoke Leaves Provide Stimulating Digestion Benefits

The leaves from the plant of this familiar food are found to be beneficial to our digestion and metabolism, potentially reducing cholesterol. The artichoke has long been eaten as a vegetable, and has been ascribed many beneficial attributes. Artichokes were cultivated in the ancient Mediterranean and enjoyed great popularity in the thriving Roman Empire. From then until its mid-16th century reemergence, the artichoke hovered in sporadic obscurity.

Greek philosopher Theophrastus, a recognized naturalist, wrote of artichoke cultivation in Sicily and Italy around 300 B.C. Several centuries later, physicians and naturalists in Greece and Rome collected and recorded information on the health remedies resulting from intake of the artichoke and its preparations. The artichoke was also considered an aphrodisiac and a delicacy; to this day that estimation still remains.

Along with possessing a pleasantly robust and slightly bitter flavor, the fleshy lobes of the artichoke contain vitamins A and C, dietary magnesium, folic acid, fiber, as well as potassium and manganese, among other essential nutrients.

But the story doesn't end there. The oft-thrown away serrated leaves of the artichoke plant, a member of the thistle family, contain even more health benefits than their edible counterpart. What most people are familiar with is actually the edible flower bud of the artichoke plant.

The plant's leaves contain two key substances with health-giving attributes, the main one being cynarin. What is fascinating about this compound is that fresh artichoke leaves only contain trace amounts of cynarin. During the extraction and drying process, the levels rise due to chemical changes that occur during the process. Artichoke leaf extract contains beneficial levels of this compound that provides maximum benefit when ingested. Before more potent pharmaceuticals were developed by drug companies, synthetic cynarin preparations were prescribed to patients with high cholesterol.

Cynarin stimulates bile secretion in the liver and gallbladder; working as a digestive aid to break down fats and cholesterol. Additionally, increased bile production assists the digestive track in eliminating toxins from the liver.

Bile is formed in the liver, created by the combination of cholesterol and triglycerides. Often times these two terms are considered negative, but not all cholesterol is bad cholesterol. Some forms are necessary for normal body function. Once the bile is formed in the liver, it is stored in the gallbladder. Bile not only works to eliminate toxins, it also emulsifies fats to allow them to be digested and metabolized. Without bile the digestive track would be a disaster, and the body would be unable to absorb fat soluble vitamins.

The process by which artichoke leaf extract is thought to lower cholesterol levels is made up of two parts. More bile means the liver has more power and efficiency in breaking down and eliminating cholesterol. In addition to the increased ability to get rid cholesterol, artichoke leaf extract has been shown to inhibit cholesterol production in the liver. This second attribute is thought to come from the levels of luteolin in the extract.

Luteolin, a flavonoid, is an antioxidant efficient at fighting free radicals and reinforcing the functions of the immune system. Additionally, luteolin has been shown in studies to increase carbohydrate metabolism and prevent LDL-cholesterol oxidation.

Medical science is only beginning to reveal the details of how artichoke leaf extract works to improve cardiovascular and digestive health, while ancient physicians and traditional healers had a hunch all along.

## About the Author

More information on [artichoke leaf extract](#) is available at VitaNet &reg;, LLC Health Food Store. <http://vitanetonline.com/>

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