

Artichoke Center of The World!

Yes, we have San Francisco, Disneyland, Yosemite and a myriad of other famed spots right here in California, but...did you know we also have...*The Artichoke Center of the World!*...

CASTROVILLE

Pop: 7168

"Since the 1920s, Castroville has produced the world's best artichokes. Secrets of the great "Globe" 'choke are known only to the Italian families who started the industry in this perfect setting. Artichokes surround Castroville, the righteously acclaimed Artichoke Center of the World. This is where Marilyn Monroe, then known as Norma Jean, got her start as the first artichoke festival queen. Castroville is an eccentric little hamlet. One of Steinbeck's finest short stories, *Johnnie Bear*, was set here.

Swiss Italians, who also grew the first wine vineyards in Salinas Valley, began the California artichoke industry here. It is now a \$50 million crop for Pajaro Valley - where Castroville and Moss Landing host nearly all the artichoke fields. Premiere growing ground is sacrificed only for a children's playground, a waterfowl's wetland preserve, and an efficiency of homes and business. All the rest of the land is dedicated to the business of making Green Globe Artichokes, which are harvested year round. Andrew Molera, for whom the state park near Point Sur is named, planted the first artichokes in these parts in the '20s. Now more than 3/4ths of the world's crop is grown here. And they are grown and harvested by hand. No machines are involved.

Globe artichokes, the best, and actually the only authentic chokes that are known for culinary excellence, are only grown here, and grown only here. The Castroville families, descendants of the pioneer 'choke growers, don't share their secrets. And they are not grown from seeds. All artichokes, all on the same plant, even, grow to different sizes. The skilled pickers in the Castroville fields know when the 'choke is mature. This little niche of the Monterey Bay is the only place in the world that can grow artichokes of this extraordinary quality. It is a rare convergence of cool misty sea air and alluvial ground filled with rich nutrients from two rivers, Pajaro and Salinas.

Moss Landing, which straddles Elkhorn Slough and the Ocean at the mouth of Pajaro River, is also prime growing land for strawberries, brussels sprouts, cabbages and exotic specialty vegetables. The Artichoke Festival - 3d weekend in May - features a parade, a 10-K race, arts & crafts, live music, many artichoke dishes prepared by celebrity chefs, and on-going children's entertainment. [<http://www.pelicanetwork.net/castroville.htm>]

