



In the Kitchen

with Barb Agee

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Artichokes Demystified

Artichokes, the oddest and edgiest of edible flowers, are one of the oldest-known foods and possibly first cultivated in Northern Africa. They have nourished people for several thousand years and are still enjoyed in every corner of the globe. Known as a *perennial thistle*, there are 140 classified varieties but only four are grown commercially with California producing nearly 100% of the artichokes for the US and Italy leading as the world's largest grower of these tenderhearted thistles. Artichokes are naturally packed with potassium, magnesium and vitamin C and contain some of the most powerful polyphenol-type antioxidants. They are also low in calories and high in fiber. Because the taste is described as heavenly, the leaves and hearts of artichokes easily serve up as the star in many different types of recipes.

Crispy Sesame-Crusted Artichoke Leaves

1 large artichoke	2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 tablespoons butter, melted	½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil	2 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted

Heat oven to 425°F. Pull off the tiny superficial leaves that are growing around the bottom of the artichoke. With a sharp knife, trim off the top ½-inch of the artichoke. With a pair of kitchen scissors, snip off the tip of each leaf to remove the tiny stickers. Cook in a large pot of boiling water until leaves can easily be pulled off, about 45 minutes. Remove from water and drain. Pull the off the leaves and place in a large bowl. Remove the choke with a spoon. Slice the artichoke heart and place in bowl with leaves.

Mix butter and oils with red pepper flakes. Pour oil mixture over artichoke leaves and heart slices. Toss to completely coat leaves and heart slices. Place leaves and heart slices on a large baking sheet; sprinkle toasted sesame seeds evenly over leaves and heart slices. Place in hot oven for 5 minutes. Serve immediately.



More artichoke recipe ideas found on the World Wide Web

Artichoke Frittata — <http://tinyurl.com/7wt5hpr>
Spinach and Artichoke Salad — <http://tinyurl.com/cen565d>
Baby Artichoke Crisp — <http://tinyurl.com/7jmhxlo>
Jerusalem Artichoke Soup — <http://tinyurl.com/83hdt62>
Slow-Braised Chicken with Artichokes — <http://tinyurl.com/77djarr>
Pilaf Stuffed Artichokes — <http://tinyurl.com/86fq4a9>
Artichoke and Chicken Pizza — <http://tinyurl.com/755hlmy>
Artichoke and Ham Omelet — <http://tinyurl.com/6tcpswa>



Artichoke Hearts Stuffed Pasta Shells

8 ounces large pasta shells *	1/3 cup red sweet pepper, coarsely chopped
Olive oil	1 small tomato, coarsely chopped
Salt	1 green onions, thinly sliced
4 to 6 slices of bacon **	One 13.75 ounce can of artichoke hearts
1 1/2 cups bread crumbs (good quality Artisan bread)	1 cup Parmesan Cheese, grated
1 teaspoon fresh thyme, chopped	1 lemon
1/2 cup green olives, coarsely chopped	

Heat oven to 350°F. Cook pasta shells according to directions for al dente. Drain and toss with 1 tablespoon of olive oil and salt to taste. Set aside to cool.

Cut bacon lengthwise and then slice thinly. Cook in skillet until crisp; add bread crumbs and chopped thyme; cook 2 minutes longer.

Remove bacon mixture to a large bowl. Add remaining ingredients and mix together. Fill pasta shells with artichoke mixture and place shells in a large baking dish. Place in oven and heat thoroughly, about 20 minutes.

Zest and juice lemon. Mix 1 teaspoon lemon zest, 1 tablespoon lemon juice and 1 tablespoon olive oil together. Drizzle over hot stuffed pasta shells and serve immediately.



*May substitute 16 jumbo shells
**May use pancetta instead of bacon

Alternate Sauces

Red Sweet Pepper Sauce

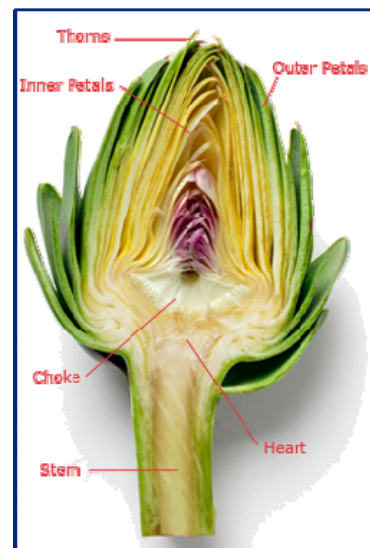
2 tablespoons olive oil	1 teaspoon lemon zest
1/4 cup sweet onion, finely chopped	1 cup whipping cream
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped and minced	Salt and pepper to taste
1/2 large red sweet pepper, finely chopped	

In a skillet, add olive oil and heat over medium high. Add onion and sauté until softened. Add garlic and red pepper and continue cooking for 3 to 4 minutes. Remove skillet from heat and slowly mix in cream, stirring constantly. Return skillet to medium heat and simmer until sauce has thickened slightly. Salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle over hot stuffed pasta shells and serve immediately.

Hot Mustard Sauce

2 tablespoons hot Chinese mustard	2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon honey	1 teaspoon finely grated garlic

Mix together and drizzle over hot stuffed pasta shells.



Anatomy of an artichoke
(via Ocean Mist Farms)