

Nino's Guide to Enjoying Artichokes



Just what is an Artichoke anyway? Are Artichokes good for you?

The globe artichoke, also called "French Artichoke" and "Green Artichoke," derives its common name from the northern Italian words articiocco and artiocclos. This latter term is supposed to come from the Ligurian word cocali, meaning a pine cone.

The Artichoke is a perennial in the thistle group of the sunflower family and is believed to be a native of the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands. In full growth, the plant spreads to cover an area about six feet in diameter and reaches a height of three to four feet. The "vegetable" that we eat is actually the plant's flower bud. Today most Artichokes grown worldwide are cultivated in France, Italy, and Spain, while California provides nearly 100 percent of the United States crop. Baby artichokes are not a separate variety but merely smaller versions of larger artichokes. Their size comes from their location on the artichoke plant. They are picked from the lower parts of the artichoke plant where the plant fronds protect them from sun, in effect stunting their growth.

One medium Artichoke or a 3 1/2 ounces portion contains: 25 Calories, 3 gr. Protein, 6 gr. Carbohydrate, 0 gr. Fat, 75 mg Sodium, 185 gr. Potassium, 4 gr. Dietary Fiber and 10% RDA of Vitamin C.

How do I prepare an Artichoke for cooking?



How can you prepare Artichokes?

Artichokes can be successfully cooked in a number of ways. Each method has their devoted followers: The most common preparation method is **Simmering/Boiling followed by: Microwaving, Steaming, Grilling, Deep Frying, Braising, Sautéing, Roasting & Pressure-Cooking**. Many of these methods are described in more detail on the back of this flyer.

First, trim the chokes by cutting off the bottom stalk, about 1 inch below the last row of leaves, then peeling the stalk like a carrot. Next, cut off the tops of the thistle (leaf) ends (about one-fourth to one-third down from the point of each leaf). Lastly, loosen the Artichoke up a bit by spreading the leaves out away from the center so they cook evenly.



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The most popular cooking methods for your Artichokes

Simmering or Boiling



Prepare a pot of boiling, lightly salted water large enough to cook the amount of artichokes you have. In addition, some cooks like to season the water with a few sprigs of fresh dill or basil, some garlic cloves and some freshly cracked black peppercorns. Regardless of whether or not you season your water you **MUST** add the juice of one lemon for every quart of water in order to acidify the water so that the Artichokes do not oxidize and turn brown. Prepare your Artichoke for cooking using the preparation instructions on the opposite page. Next place the choke in the boiling water and weight them down to submerge them beneath the water with a plate or smaller lid. Reduce heat to simmer, and cook for 30 to 40 minutes (depending on size) -- they are done when the leaves pull away easily from the main body. Drain well and add your favorite dressing or melted butter and seasonings. They can also be cooled and eaten cold.

Steaming



Steaming an Artichoke is the ideal cooking method for maintaining the high-nutrient content for which an Artichoke is known. Arrange Artichokes in a steamer insert, basket, or a special Artichoke holder in a pot deep enough to keep Artichokes above water. Cover and steam over rapid-boiling water (making sure to maintain the water level), until Artichokes are tender. Depending on size and quantity of Artichokes, steaming time can range from 30 to 50 minutes; lift out carefully and drain.

Microwaving



Place the trimmed Artichoke in a microwave safe bowl and season with 1 tablespoon of olive oil, 2 tablespoons of lemon juice, a half teaspoon of garlic salt and any fresh dill or herbs you might prefer. Place artichoke face down in the bowl and cover tightly with plastic film. Cook for 7 minutes on high. Leave the plastic cover on, and let stand for 5 minutes. Unwrap and enjoy.

Grilling



Grilling adds color and a delicious smoked flavor to Artichokes. But Artichokes need to be pre-cooked before grilling. To pre-cook Artichokes, microwave, steam or boil them. Brush cooked Artichokes with olive oil and grill — turning frequently and watching carefully — over hot coals just until nicely browned, or charred to your preference. **Option:** Cut Artichokes in half before grilling to obtain more of that grilled taste throughout the Artichoke petals.

Deep Frying



Deep Frying requires you to trim off all the leaves from a previously cooked Artichoke and then cut the resulting “heart” into bite-sized quarters or pieces. Dip these pieces in beaten egg, then in seasoned flour. Or, you can use your preferred choice of batter. Fry in hot oil in skillet or in deep fat fryer at 350°F, turning once, until golden brown and crisp, about 5 to 8 minutes depending on cooking source.

How to eat an Artichoke

A popular way of eating Artichokes is while still warm, and dipped in butter. It is an exquisite taste. Begin by peeling off a leaf. Dip the bottom of the leaf, (the inside “grayish pulpy part”) into the sauce lightly. Place it practically all the way to the hilt in your open mouth. Close mouth, with teeth held lightly together on the leaf, and pull the leaf out, scraping the soft underside of the leaf off so it stays in your mouth, while the fibery rest of the leaf comes out as you pull. Continue around, leaf by leaf, as they get smaller, and you come to the inedible hair like thistles. Take those out by just lifting them up and out of the “button-like” bottom. The bottom can simply be eaten by cutting into pieces, and dipping into the sauce. Some claim this is the best part.

Simple sauces for enjoying your Artichokes

For your first attempts at eating artichokes, you can use plain mayonnaise, or melted butter. If you enjoy mayonnaise, you can additionally season the mayonnaise with any number of herbs and spices from curry, to cumin and chili powder. Or, try dipping your Artichokes in any one of “Nino’s Secret” Fresh Salad Dressings. Delicious!