

Stuffed Artichokes

When fresh artichokes appear, grab them and don't look back. They're a fleeting whisper of spring at its finest. Elegant and brutal at once, adorned with thistle-topped leaves, they are delicious and like no other vegetable (except for cardoons, their cousin). They look like a million bucks on the plate, and they'll make you work for the pleasure of enjoying them. Indulge and take the time to prep them. They'll be gone by summer.

See the Cook's Note on what to look for when shopping for artichokes.

Ingredients

- 1 lemon
- 4 large or 8 small artichokes
- 3 cups panko or plain breadcrumbs
- 1 cup grated Pecorino Romano
- 3 tablespoons minced mint leaves
- 3 tablespoons minced flat-leaf parsley, plus 3 whole sprigs
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 large cloves garlic
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

special equipment

- Small sharp spoon, such as a grapefruit spoon
- Steamer basket and lidded pot

Directions

Grate 1/2 teaspoon of zest from the lemon onto a plate. Halve the lemon and squeeze one half of into a large bowl, then drop it in and fill the bowl with cold water, making an acidulated water bath. This will keep the trimmed artichokes from turning brown. Cut the other half of the lemon into slices and reserve.

trim the artichokes

Working on one artichoke at a time, trim the stem and then peel. Rub with the halved lemon and add the stem to the acidulated water. Snap off bottom leaves until the tender yellow ones show all the way around the bottom. Slice off the top third of the artichoke to remove the tops of the leaves. (A serrated knife is the best tool for the job). Rub all of the cut surfaces of the artichoke with the halved lemon, then add to the acidulated water. Continue with the remaining artichokes before proceeding to the next step.

remove the chokes

Dip the artichoke into the acidulated water from time to time as you work to keep it from turning brown. Plunge a sharp small spoon or paring knife straight into the center of the artichoke and rotate it around to loosen the choke, the furry thistle center. Scoop out the choke and discard. Make sure you remove all of the thorny little leaves, and keep as many of the pale yellow ones that you can. Do not cut through the bottom heart. Submerge each trimmed artichoke in the acidulated water as you finish. (Drape a paper towel over the artichokes, directly in the water, to keep them fully submerged.)

stuff the artichokes

Mix the breadcrumbs, Pecorino, mint, parsley, salt, pepper and the reserved lemon zest in a large bowl. Grate garlic over the top with a medium rasp. Use your hands to mix, rubbing everything together to make sure the zest and garlic get evenly distributed.

Place 3 cups water, lemon slices and parsley sprigs in a 2-quart (or larger) saucepan. Fit pot with a steamer. Cover and set over low heat.

To stuff the artichokes, remove one at a time from the water bath and lightly pat dry. Carefully separate leaves with your thumbs and gently push breadcrumbs in between, and fill the center. Don't pack the cavity too tightly, but make sure everything is covered.

Place artichokes in steamer stuffed side up and drizzle the tops with olive oil. Cover the pot and steam over low heat. The water should sound like it's just beginning to boil. The pot should be full of steam, but little or none should escape. Adjust the heat until the temperature is right. Artichokes are done when they are tender, their leaves are loose and a paring knife easily pierces through them in a few different places. Timing varies with size. Small artichokes will take 20 to 25 minutes to steam, and large could take 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer to a serving platter or plates and serve warm.

Cook's note

Look for artichokes that are the brightest green, heavy, and not dried out at all. When they are fresh, the leaves will pop when you snap them off.

total time: 1 hour 15 minutes

active prep: 40 minutes

serves: 4

difficulty: medium