

FOOD FEATURE



FUNNY FLOWER

KITCHEN DIVA PHOTO

There are many ways to prepare fresh artichokes. Large heads can be stuffed and roasted. Or artichokes can be steamed and the leaves removed and served for dipping into sauce. Once the fuzzy center — the 'choke' of the artichoke — is removed, the hollowed out core can be used as a serving dish for salads or soups.

BY ANGELA SHELF MEDEARIS AND GINA HARLOW
THE KITCHEN DIVA

It's strange, it's lovely, it's a thistle, it's a flower, it's the pale-green blossom of spring — it's the artichoke. Artichokes are in season, so it's time to go to the market and get some thorny deliciousness for yourself.

Artichokes may be a food you think you know — stripped down to its heart and frozen and packaged in a box, jar or can. But artichokes are delicious in all their forms. If you've never had the chance to buy them in their full, sculptural beauty, fresh off the plant, mature or young and tender, then you're truly missing something.

The artichoke is a member of the cardoon family, which is native to the Mediterranean. Cultivation began there as early as the 9th century. The artichoke likes mild, dry climates for

growing, and in the United States it seems to prefer California's central valley almost exclusively. Being what it is, a leafy flower, makes it a great source of fiber. It's also high in vitamin C and magnesium.

If you live in California, you've probably had the chance to savor a fresh artichoke. However, it might seem a little exotic to the rest of us. The big round globe, with all its layers, might be a little intimidating. What to do with it? What is edible? What is not?

Use fresh artichokes within a few days of purchase. You may want to trim off the prickly points of the leaves before preparing them. Surprisingly, most of the flower is edible. The only exceptions are the more fibrous end of the stem (the upper part of the stem is very good) and the center. This part of the large, mature artichoke is inedible.

There are many tasty

and attractive ways to prepare fresh artichokes. Large heads are delicious stuffed and roasted. Or artichokes can be steamed and the leaves removed and served for dipping into any sauce your imagination allows. Once the fuzzy center — the "choke" of the artichoke — is removed, the hollowed out core can be used as a serving dish for salads or soups. Small, young ar-

tichokes don't have to have the fibrous center choke removed, and can be cooked and eaten whole.

Try this wonderful recipe for Lemon Chicken With Artichokes and Olives. The simple combination of flavors showcases artichokes in a delicious way.

— Angela Shelf Medearis is an award-winning children's author, culinary historian and author of

LEMON CHICKEN WITH ARTICHOKE AND OLIVES

- 1 large (4 pound) chicken, halved, backbone removed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons poultry seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 6 whole garlic cloves with skins on
- 5 large artichoke hearts, quartered, 3 1/2 pounds total (See "How to Prep Hearts" below)
- 2 tablespoons grated lemon peel
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 cup unpitted green olives
- 5 flat-leaf parsley sprigs

1. Preheat oven to 375 F. Heat oil and butter in large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Sprinkle chicken all over with poultry seasoning, salt and pepper. Lay chicken in hot

oil, skin-side down. Cook until browned, about 5 minutes. Turn chicken over. Pour the chicken broth around the outside edges of the chicken. Add the garlic, artichokes, lemon juice and lemon peel.

2. Roast chicken in oven, uncovered, until cooked through, about 1 hour or when temperature reaches 165 F on thermometer placed in thickest part of the thigh without touching bone. Remove the bird from the oven; let rest 10 minutes. (The thigh meat is forgiving, even if overcooked. In fact, it becomes more tender when cooked to at least 160 F.) Add olives and parsley and serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

How to Prep Artichoke Hearts: Snap off thick green outer leaves down to yellowish core. Halve artichokes crosswise; discard thorny tips. Trim stem to about 1/2 inch and peel tough outer skin from remaining stem. Halve artichoke lengthwise; scoop out and discard fuzzy, red-tipped choke. Put hearts in cold water with a little lemon juice and set aside until you're ready to cook.

seven cookbooks. Her new cookbook is "The Kitchen Diva's Diabetic Cookbook." Her website is www.divapro.com. To see how-to videos, recipes and much, much more, Like Angela Shelf Med-

earis, The Kitchen Diva! on Facebook. Read Gina Harlow's blog about food and gardening at www.peachesandprosciutto.com. Recipes may not be reprinted without permission from Angela Shelf Medearis

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