

Artichoke gratin

Artichokes are a bit of a fuff to prepare, but once you've tasted the results you'll realise it was worth it! Once you've braised the artichokes, instead of putting them in a gratin you could add them to a salad instead, or marinate them in herbs and olive oil and serve them cold as antipasti. How much of the artichoke you cut away and how much you save to eat totally depends on the artichoke's size and maturity. Cut off anything that you imagine will still be tough after cooking.



Serves: 8 as a side dish

8 fresh large globe artichokes
2 large lemons
2 glasses of dry white wine (approx 300ml)
2 bay leaves, fresh if possible
a few sprigs of thyme
4 fat garlic cloves (two sliced and two minced)
a bunch of parsley (approx 40g)
a small bunch of marjoram or oregano (6 or so decent sprigs)
6 tbsps finely grated Parmesan
6 tbsps fresh white breadcrumbs
olive oil
salt and pepper

1. Squeeze one lemon into a bowl of water and toss in the peels too. Trim the artichokes: Pull off several layers of outer leaves until you reach the more tender ones inside. Cut cross-wise through the artichoke about 1 inch from the base. (Artichokes vary enormously; if yours are small, young and tender, you can leave more of the leaves on, perhaps just cutting off the top inch.) Trim the stem so that just 1 inch remains. Use a paring knife to trim off the tough dark green skin from the bases of the leaves and the stem. Cut the artichoke in quarters lengthways and use a teaspoon to scoop out the hairy choke. Place immediately in the bowl of acidulated water to minimise discolouration.
2. Squeeze the juice of the remaining lemon into a non-reactive saucepan and add the wine. Lift the artichokes out of their water with a slotted spoon and add them to the saucepan. Pour in just enough water to cover. Add a good pinch of salt, two sliced cloves of garlic, the bay and thyme and several large glugs of olive oil. Cover and simmer for around 20 minutes or until tender, removing the lid half-way through cooking. (Again, artichokes vary; they may take anything from 10 to 30 minutes to cook.)
3. Meanwhile finely chop the leaves and tender stems of the parsley and oregano. Peel and mince the remaining two garlic cloves and mix them with the chopped herbs, grated Parmesan and breadcrumbs.
4. Heat the oven to 180C and lightly grease a gratin dish with olive oil. When the artichokes are cooked, use a slotted spoon to lift them out and into the gratin dish. Catch some of the garlic too if possible. Season them with salt and pepper. Boil the braising liquid hard for a few minutes to concentrate the flavours. Moisten the artichokes with a ladle-full of braising liquid (around 150ml), then scatter over the herb-breadcrumb mix. Finally drizzle a several tablespoons of olive oil over the breadcrumbs.
5. Bake for around 25 minutes or until the gratin is bubbling and browned on top. Serve hot or warm.