

## Okey-Dokey.....Artichokey

By Ora Emmerich

UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers

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Flashback to being ten years old, sitting at the dining room table with sister and brothers, staring at the ridiculous looking “things” sitting on the plates.....did the parents really think the children would eat these? Actually, even the parents stared at the California flowers on the plates, not quite understanding how to eat the fascinating food recommended by the neighbors. Luckily, the neighbors came over and stopped laughing long enough to show the family how to strip off a piece, dip it into melted butter, and scrape the delicious stuff into waiting mouths. The entire family has loved artichokes since that night.

California produces almost 100 percent of the artichoke crop in the United States, and the prime harvest season is from March to May. The delectable, medium size unopened flower head of the artichoke plant provides 25% of the daily requirements for vitamin C, 28% of the daily requirements for dietary fiber, 24% for Vitamin K, and 22% of folate, in addition to delivering many other minerals. All this for only 60.2 calories. Oh, was mention made of the fact that the artichoke also contains 4.2 grams, or 8%, of the daily requirement for protein? What a great food.

As with all great foods, however, the quality of the artichoke determines the desirability. When shopping, be sure to look for the freshest produce possible. The Iowa State University Extension Service recommends “When selecting an artichoke, make sure that it feels heavy for its size. This means that it will have more artichoke meat for you to enjoy. Its leaves should lay tight together, and they should be deep green in color. The leaves should also make a squeaking sound when they are gently pressed together.” Raw artichokes may be stored for up to one week in the refrigerator, but taste best when eaten on the day of purchase.

Artichokes may be boiled, steamed or cooked in the microwave. Cut off most of the stem and trim the pointy edges of the leaves. Cook until soft in the center and enjoy with melted butter or mayonnaise. Check on the internet for other recipes for artichokes.

Have a bumper crop? Prepare the artichoke hearts for storage in the freezer. Remove all the leaves, and scrape off the fuzzy “choke.” Then, cut the stem close to the bottom. The part remaining, the heart, must then be washed in cold water and drained. The University of Georgia Extension Service recommends to “Water blanch 7 minutes. Cook, drain and pack, leaving no headspace. Seal and freeze.” Just that easy. Almost as easy as this recipe;

### Artichoke Gondolas

- 4 artichokes (medium size), cooked
- 1/2 cup sun-dried tomatoes (not oil-packed)
- 1 eggplant (small), peeled and diced
- 2 cups low sodium chicken broth
- 1/4 cup chopped onion

- 1 Tbsp fresh oregano
- 1 Tbsp fresh basil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/4 tsp pepper

Instructions:

1. Halve artichokes lengthwise; remove center petals and fuzzy centers of artichokes. Remove outer leaves of artichokes; reserve. Trim out hearts and chop finely. Set aside.
  2. Rehydrate tomatoes in boiling water for 3 minutes until softened. Drain and rinse; chop.
  3. Cook eggplant in simmering chicken broth for 10 minutes; drain well.
  4. In a blender or food processor container place chopped tomatoes, drained eggplant, onion, herbs, garlic, salt and pepper. Cover and process until nearly smooth. Taste for seasoning. Stir in chopped artichoke hearts.
  5. To serve, arrange artichoke leaves on a serving platter; spoon 1 heaping teaspoon of the eggplant mixture onto wide end of artichoke leaves. Garnish with a fresh herb leaf, if desired.
  6. Alternate serving idea: Arrange artichoke leaves on a platter, surrounding a bowl of the eggplant mixture. Use artichoke leaves to scoop up individual servings of the dip. Dip can be prepared up to 24 hours ahead and chilled until serving time.
- Makes 4 servings. Iowa State University Extension.

Further questions? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will call back to with an answer. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for any group. For more information about the public education classes and activities, including our free public classes on food safety and pressure canning, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at [http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master\\_Food\\_Preservers/](http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/).