



A Question of Taste

By Hilary Keating Callaghan

Don't let prickles deter you

Most people hesitate to serve artichokes for the same reason they would hesitate to pick up a porcupine — an uncertainty about how to handle either object.

This similarity extends even to the sharp spines which tip the artichoke leaves. Eliminating these spines makes handling the artichoke much less painful and should, thus, be your first step in preparing the vegetable. This step is probably most easily accomplished with a pair of scissors. Simply snip off the end of each leaf, leaving the edible, whitish bottom attached.

Keep snipping the tips off until a central core of leaves, which are green only at the tips is exposed. The pale base of these leaves is at least 1 1/4 inches high. Using a sharp knife, cut off the top part of this core, remove all of the green portion. Be sure the knife used is stainless steel as any knife with carbon knives or with iron, steel or aluminum cooking vessels will bicken the artichoke and impart a harsh and disagreeable taste.

WITHIN THE central core are tiny, pale leaves with purple prickly tips curving inward. Use a knife with a rounded end or a spoon to remove these leaves as well as the fuzzy choco "choke" beneath them.

Pare away the green, outer portion of the stem, leaving only the edible, white core of the stem. Rub all cut surfaces immediately with lemon juice or coat with olive oil since contact with the air will discolor these surfaces.

Place the trimmed artichoke, stem upward, in a large, heavy stainless

steel or enameled ironware pot with about 1 inch of water in the bottom. Bring the water to a boil, lower the heat to medium and cook about 35 to 40 minutes.

The artichoke is now ready to serve. The hollowed-out interior may be filled with any hot filling. Creamed seafood or vegetables would be good choices.

I have included a recipe for a creamed spinach filling which combines with the artichoke to make a tasty first course or side dish.

THE ARTICHOKE stem should be trimmed off before serving, leaving a flat base so that the artichoke will stand upright. The stem is edible, however, so either save it for a salad or simply eat it along with the rest of this dish. The tender underside of the artichoke leaf is also edible. Just pull the leaf between your teeth to scrape this off. The bottom of the artichoke (what is left after all the leaves are pulled off) is not only edible, but is the most succulent part of this vegetable, worth all the trimming to get there.

If you wish, the cooked artichoke may be chilled and used as a casing for a cold salad, such as the cheese-egg salad combination described below. Combined with hot corn bread, this makes an unusual luncheon or dinner entrée.

The Ranch-style Dip can be used for the leaves from either of these dishes. A platter of raw vegetables could accompany either dish and share the dip. Hollandaise sauce, a good quality mayonnaise or a vinaigrette dressing could also be used for this purpose.

A final word about accompaniments to artichokes is in order. A chemical property in artichokes causes any food or beverages eaten with them to taste sweeter than they otherwise would.

Consequently, you might not want to serve a delicate, dry wine with them. If you are serving a good wine with your dinner, you might wish to serve the artichoke as a first course and not pour the wine until the second course.

ARTICHOKES FILLED WITH SPINACH
6 cooked artichokes
1 lb. fresh spinach, washed and trimmed,
or 1 package (10 oz.) frozen spinach
2 tbsp. butter, divided
1 tsp. flour
1/2 cup scalded milk
Salt
Pepper
1/2 tsp. nutmeg
1 egg yolk
1 tsp. cream
6 tsp. freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Cook fresh spinach in 2 cups boiling salted water about 1 minute, or cook frozen spinach according to package directions. Drain well, pressing to remove all moisture. Chop finely.

Melt 1 tsp. of the butter in a small skillet. Add the spinach, nutmeg and salt and pepper to taste and cook over medium-low heat until thoroughly heated.

Melt remaining 1 tsp. butter in a small saucepan. Add the flour and cook, stirring, over low heat for 3 to 5 minutes. Gradually stir in the scalded

milk and continue to cook until thickened and smooth. Remove pan from the heat and whisk in the egg yolk and cream. Stir into the spinach mixture. Continue cooking until just simmering, stirring constantly. Do not boil.

Arrange the artichokes in a baking dish and fill the centers with the creamed spinach. Sprinkle each with 1 tsp. of the cheese. Bake for 10 minutes in a preheated 400 degree oven.

SALAD-STUFFED ARTICHOKE
4 small artichokes, cooked and cooled
6 hard-boiled eggs, sliced
1 cup (4 oz.) shredded Cheddar cheese
1 medium stalk celery, chopped
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. paprika
1/2 cup silvered almonds
1/2 cup mayonnaise
1/2 cup chopped pimiento
1 tsp. lemon juice

In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients except the artichokes. Spoon this mixture into the hollowed artichokes. Cover and chill thoroughly, at least 1 hour. Garnish with additional pimiento. 4 servings.

RANCH-STYLE DIP

1/2 cup mayonnaise
1/2 cup unflavored yogurt
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. onion salt
1/2 tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. parsley flakes

Stir all ingredients together in a small bowl. Chill at least 30 minutes before serving.



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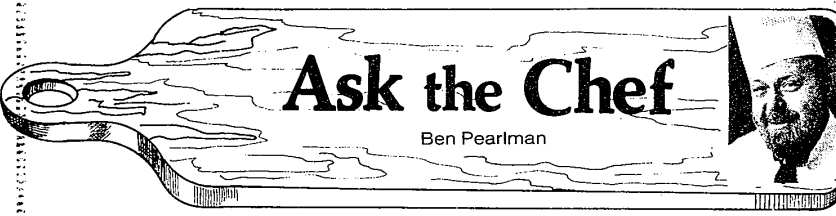
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Freeze Sunday—eat better Monday

The Observer & Eccentric is presenting Chef Ben Pearlman as a weekly columnist starting with this edition.

His column, titled "Ask the Chef," will appear every Monday, and is designed to answer those questions you've always had about recipes, meats, poultry, seafood, vegetables, baking, hors d'oeuvre, canapés, relishes, sauces, cooking techniques, tools, equipment and related items.

Pearlman, who studied at the Culinary Institute of America in Connecticut, has been in the food business more than 20 years. He presently teaches commercial food at the Southeast Oakland Vocational Education Center in Royal Oak. He is a member of the Michigan Restaurant Association and founder of the Food Services Teacher Group.

Chef Pearlman is a practicing consultant and a member of the Food Service Executive Association, a national professional organization.

Dear Chef:

What is the difference between a colander and a strainer?

Strainers are made out of fine wire mesh with a handle and a metal frame. The colander is solid with larger holes and is able to stand independently for foods to drain. The strainer is used for straining.

Dear Chef:

We are a working couple and find it difficult to serve a variety of good tasting dinners during week nights. What can I do? I am a good cook.

Well, here's a suggestion. On Sunday when cooking that great lasagna recipe, prepare 10 to 12 portions and freeze the balance, portioned individually. Do this with roasts, casseroles, anything that freezes well. Defrost the portions in the refrigerator a day or two before they are to be used.

Dear Chef:

What is a chowder?

It is a thick fish, meat, or vegetable soup. The old French word for cauldron (pot) was chaudière. Food stewed in the cauldron became known as a chowder.

Dear Chef:

How do you clarify butter?

To clarify is to clear. Melt butter over low heat. Skim the foam and pour butter into a container, leaving milky residue in the bottom of the pan. This residue may be used in creamed soups or sauces.

Dear Chef:

My family loves the variety of cakes I've baked. Because of five kids, I usually use a 9x12-inch sheet pan. My only problem is that occasionally the frosting tears as I cut the cake. What should I do?

Try cutting the cake first and then frost.

Dear Chef:

What causes a cake to shrink and crack?

The shrinking or cracking of a cake is usually caused by a number of different problems. Let's first talk about the cake shrinking. The following conditions will cause your cake to shrink: too much liquid, too much shortening, too much butter in the pan, pan greased too heavily, or the oven temperature too hot or too cool.

Cracking usually results from baking the cake in too hot an oven. Also uneven heat will cause cakes to be low in volume, crusts to be dark and thick, and the cake to have tunnels and peaks.

Do you a question for Chef Ben? If so, send it to him, c/o Birmingham, Bloomfield Eccentric, 1225 Bowers, Birmingham 48012.

Canned pasta base for hearty supper

To stretch the budget, use canned pasta as a base for hearty main dishes that can be made in minutes.

ITALIAN-STYLE PASTA SKILLET

1/2 lb. ground beef
1/2 cup sliced celery
1 can (14 1/2 oz.) canned spaghetti in tomato sauce with cheese
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
1/2 tsp. oregano leaves, crushed
1/2 tsp. hot pepper sauce
1 slice process cheese

In skillet, brown beef and cook celery until tender. Pour off fat. Add remaining ingredients except cheese. Heat, stir occasionally. Garnish with cheese. Makes 4 servings.

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