

## Artichoke Season & Steamed Artichokes with Bagna Cauda or Warm Lemon-Garlic Sauce

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The first time I nibbled a freshly steamed, beautiful green artichoke, I was hooked. My sister Brenda made the introduction. She returned east after her first year away at college and brought artichokes and brown rice into our house. I'm sure she brought other exotic and intellectual gems but only the artichokes and rice come to mind. Anyway, I am forever grateful.

Of course I'd had artichokes from a can. My mother added them to our salads when she wanted to be fancy or the tomatoes in the grocery store looked tired or inedible or both. We thought we were quite squi-tish when Mom added a liberal sprinkle of chopped artichoke hearts to the iceberg lettuce. Squi-tish was one of my mother's favorite words. She use it to describe anything trendy or stylish.

Anyway, the artichoke hearts from the can paled in comparison to the real thing. And of course, the warm lemony-butter sauce Brenda made to go with the artichokes was nothing to sneeze at.

While artichokes are available year round, they peak in the spring. That's when I find myself feasting on them at least once a week. Here are a few fun artichoke facts to get you in the mood!

1. A member of the daisy family, an artichoke is neither a vegetable nor a fruit but a flower bud waiting to bloom.
2. Individual artichoke plants can grow five feet tall and produce more than twenty artichokes.
3. Baby artichokes aren't babies but the small buds that grow on the bottom of an artichoke stalk. I guess baby artichoke sounds better than runt-of-the-litter artichoke.
4. Artichokes are a good source of vitamin C, folic acid and magnesium and are low in sodium. If it wasn't for the devilish dips we love, they would be virtually fat-free. An average artichoke has about seventy calories.
5. Artichokes are one of the world's oldest foods and were cultivated by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. The Greeks and the Romans considered them aphrodisiacs. Myth or truth, the belief that artichokes were a love potion carried over to Europe's Middle Ages when women were not allowed to eat artichokes. The Middle Aged patriarchal powers-that-be could have been misinformed but, more likely, were just saving the tasty treats for themselves.
6. To keep artichokes fresher longer, treat them like the flowers they are. Cut about one-quarter inch from the bottom of the stem and set in a glass of water in the refrigerator.
7. Speaking of stems, they are edible. Just use a vegetable peeler to remove the fibrous outer part before steaming or braising.
8. When buying artichokes, look for plump buds with tight, green leaves. Pick them up and choose the ones which feel heavy for their size.
9. Unless you there's a hunky plumber you want to meet, don't put artichoke leaves in the disposer. They are very springy and fibrous will clog your pipes. And yes, I speak from experience!
10. And finally, my favorite ... Norma Jean Baker (who later became Marilyn Monroe) was California's first *Artichoke Queen*. She was crowned in 1948.

For an elegant start to your next dinner party, skip the salad and serve steamed artichokes with a delicious dip for a yummy first course.

Bon appétit!



## Steamed Artichokes with Bagna Cauda or Warm Lemon-Garlic Sauce

*Enjoy yummy steamed artichokes with a garlicky sauce. Bagna Cauda (warm bath) has its origins in Sicily and the Lemon-Garlic Sauce has a bit of a French accent. Enjoy!*

Serves 4

2 lemons, cut in quarters  
1 bay leaf  
1/4 cup dry white wine  
About 1 tablespoon sea salt  
4 whole artichokes

Put 1-2 quarts of water in a large pot with 1 of the quartered lemons, squeezing the juice into the water. Add the bay leaf, wine and salt to the pot. Insert a steamer basket and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. The water should just touch the bottom of the basket.

Fill a large bowl with cold water and add the remaining lemon, squeezing the juice into the water.

Rinse the artichokes under cold water. Cut off the top inch of each artichoke with a heavy knife, peel the stems or cut them off close to the base. Pull off the small and tough lower leaves and trim the leaves with kitchen shears. Drop the artichokes into the lemon-water bath to prevent them from turning brown.

Put the artichokes in the steamer basket. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and steam for about 45 minutes or until you can pull the leaves off easily and the flesh is tender. (You may need to add more water to the pot before the artichokes are cooked through.)



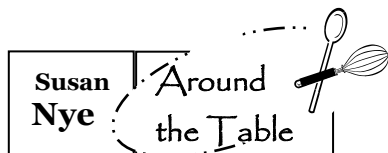
To eat, pull leaves from the artichoke, dip in Bagna Cauda or Warm Lemon-Garlic Sauce and scrape the tender meat off with your teeth. When you reach the prickly purple leaves, use a knife or spoon to remove both the leaves and the fuzzy choke covering the artichoke heart. Enjoy the artichoke heart with a little sauce.

*Artichokes can be served hot or cold. If making ahead, cool to room temperature, cover and refrigerate. Remove from the refrigerator about 30 minutes before serving.*



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*Another recipe from Susan Nye: Spring 2012/Volume 292*

### Bagna Cauda

1/2 cup olive oil  
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature\*  
8 anchovy fillets  
4 garlic cloves, smashed  
Pinch or to taste hot pepper flakes  
Juice of 1/2 lemon

Put the oil, butter, anchovies, garlic and pepper flakes into a small food processor and process until smooth.

Transfer the oil mixture to a small heavy saucepan and cook, stirring occasionally, over very low heat for 15 minutes. Whisk in the lemon juice and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Pour the sauce into individual cups and serve with the artichokes.

*\* If you prefer, you can make the Bagna Cauda without butter. Increase the olive oil from 1/2 to 3/4 cup.*

### Warm Lemon-Garlic Sauce

1/2 cup dry white wine  
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature  
1 garlic clove, minced  
1 tablespoon minced shallot  
Pinch or to taste hot pepper flakes  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper  
3-4 tablespoons mayonnaise  
Juice of 1/2 lemon

Put the wine to a small heavy saucepan, bring to a simmer over medium heat and reduce by three-quarters. Reduce the heat to low and add the butter, garlic, shallot and pepper flakes and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, over very low heat until the shallot is translucent.

Remove from the heat and add the mayonnaise and lemon juice and whisk until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper and whisk again.

Pour the sauce into individual cups and serve with the artichokes.

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