

Spaghetti with Artichokes and Ricotta

Recipe used with permission from *The Kitchen Ecosystem* by Eugenia Bone

This dish balances the tartness of artichokes cooked in wine with the sweet cream of ricotta. Homemade ricotta is best (see below). You'll need 4 cups of milk, and the ricotta can be prepared while the artichokes are cooking. I often make the artichokes in this recipe as a side dish.

SERVES 4

Ingredients

- 2 pounds baby artichokes (about 10), trimmed (see below)
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup water or vegetable stock
- 1 tablespoon sliced garlic
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves (optional)
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 12 ounces spaghetti
- 8 ounces (1 cup) ricotta cheese
- 2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley
- Extra virgin olive oil, for serving

Steps

1. Arrange the artichokes in a pot that will hold them snugly in a single layer.
2. Add the wine, oil, water, garlic, lemon juice, thyme (if using), bay leaf, and salt to taste. The braising liquid should come about halfway up the sides of the artichokes. A little more is okay.
3. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low.
4. Cover and gently braise the artichokes until very tender, about 30 minutes. You may need to rotate the artichokes, or turn them over for even cooking. The artichokes will be softened and their color bleached out some.
5. Remove the bay leaf.
6. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and add the pasta. Cook until al dente and drain.
7. Toss the pasta in a serving bowl with the artichokes and residual juices. Add the ricotta and toss gently to combine.
8. Garnish with black pepper and the parsley. If the pasta seems a bit dry, then add a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.

How to Trim an Artichoke

To trim a large artichoke for cooking, first rinse and brush off the film on the surface of the leaves. This biofilm, which is naturally produced by the artichoke, can lend a bitter flavor. Cut off the top inch of the artichoke with a serrated knife, and only about ½ inch off the stem: The artichoke stem is a continuation of the heart and tastes food, so don't remove it unless you need the artichoke to sit upright for serving. Long stems should be peeled with a vegetable peeler down to the pale green flesh. The artichoke and stem can be cooked together, or the stem chopped and cooked separately. Snip off the thorns on the tip of the leaves. Rub the cut ends of the artichoke with a half lemon if you want to prevent browning. You can also place the artichokes in a bowl of water and lemon juice, or water and a pinch of ascorbic acid to prevent browning. To trim a baby artichoke, remove the tough outer leaves, reducing the volume of the vegetable by half, until the artichoke has the shape of a teardrop or candle flame and is pale green to yellow and soft to the touch. With a paring knife, cut around the base, removing all of the rough surfaces. Halve the artichoke lengthwise and pluck out any thisty interior leaves.

Ricotta Cheese

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I make a ricotta that is blissfully dry, which works well in my recipes for ravioli, lasagna, and as a garnish on salads and pasta dishes. (In fact, you can replate any feta cheese in any of the recipes in this book with this ricotta.) If you want a creamy ricotta, to serve dressed with a fruit syrup (or the candy cap mushroom sauce, page 197) or to spread on crostini or to make sannoli cream, then you need to add some cream to the recipe: Replace 1 cup of the whole milk with heavy cream. Goat milk makes a creamier ricotta as well.

Ricotta-making produces a lot of whey, which you can use in lieu of milk in some recipes.

MAKES 1 CUP

Ingredients

- 4 cups whole organic milk
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons distilled white vinegar

Steps

1. Have ready a colander lined with cheesecloth placed over a large bowl.
2. Place the milk and salt in a large heavy-bottomed pot.
3. Slowly bring the milk to 185F. The milk will sizzle at the perimeter of the pot.
4. Take the milk off the heat and stir in the vinegar. The curds will precipitate promptly.
5. Allow them to form, a couple of minutes.
6. Pour the milk and curds through the cheesecloth.
7. Allow the curds to drain for an hour or so, then squeeze the curds in the cheesecloth and pack in a bowl.
8. The ricotta holds for about 2 days in the refrigerator.