

Stuffed Artichokes

½ cup olive oil	2 hard-boiled eggs
6 garlic cloves	¼ cup minced parsley
1¼ teaspoons crushed red pepper flakes	2 tablespoons minced fresh oregano
6 large globe artichokes	2 tablespoons minced fresh mint
3 lemons	1 cup grated Parmigiano
2 cups fresh bread crumbs	Salt and pepper to taste

Mince the garlic and place in a small saucepan with the olive oil and 1 teaspoon of the pepper flakes. Over very low heat, warm the mixture for about 5-10 minutes just until very fragrant, but not at all cooked. Allow this mixture to stand for at least 1 hour.

Juice the lemons and save the squeezed rinds. Fill a large bowl about half full with cold water, and add half of the lemon juice.

With a heavy, sharp knife, slice off the stems of the artichokes flush with bottom so that they will stand upright. Rub the bottoms of the artichokes with a squeezed lemon rind so that they will not discolor. If the stems are small and fairly tender, you can remove the outer fibrous layer with a vegetable peeler. If they are larger and tougher, slice off the tough outer layer with a knife. Place the peeled stems in the lemon water.

Snap off the tough leaves around the bottom of the artichokes, or if very tough, use a knife to cut them off. Slice off the top third of each artichoke. Hold the artichokes in your hands and with your thumbs spread the leaves of the artichokes apart as much as possible.

Using a large heavy spoon, scoop out the purplish leaves in the center and continue to scoop out the hairy choke under those leaves. If you can't get all of the chokes out, your diners can remove them easily with a spoon after they are cooked. Once a choke has been prepared, place it in the lemon water, so it doesn't discolor.

Finely chop the hard-boiled eggs. In a small bowl, mix together the bread crumbs with half of the infused garlic and pepper flake oil. Stir in the minced parsley, oregano, mint, chopped egg, and the Parmigiano. Mix well and season with salt and pepper to taste. If the mixture seems too dry, add a little extra olive oil.

Remove 1 choke at a time from the lemon water, and drain it thoroughly. Fill the center of the artichoke with the breadcrumb mixture, also working as much of the mixture as possible in between the leaves. Place each stuffed artichoke in a large, heavy Dutch oven. Tuck the peeled stems in between each artichoke.

Add enough cold water to the Dutch oven to cover the bottom third of the artichokes. Stir into the water the remaining infused oil and pepper mixture, the remaining ¼ teaspoon of pepper flakes, and the remaining lemon juice. Add a generous amount of salt and pepper to this liquid.

Bring the artichokes to the boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer, and cover the artichokes tightly. Cook for about 45-minutes to 1 hour until the leaves are tender when poked with a paring knife.

Optional: If you want the crumb mixture to be browned, remove them from the Dutch oven, put them in a baking dish, and place under a broiler for a minute or two.

Serve the artichokes, plus 1 stem for each, in shallow soup bowls, spooning some of the liquid around the bottom of each portion.

The artichokes may be cooked ahead, and then gently reheated before serving.