

Cardoon Fritters

For the Cardoons

1 bunch cardoons
¾ cup olive oil
1 lemon
2 tablespoons parsley
Salt
1 bay leaf
Vegetable oil for deep frying

For the Fritter Batter

⅓ cup flour
3 large eggs
¼ teaspoon salt
Pinch cayenne
½ cup heavy cream

To Prep the Cardoons

This preparation is best done with rubber gloves to prevent staining your hands. Fill a large bowl with cold water and the juice of half a lemon into it. Break the stalks from the core. Discard any tough outer stalks. Run a sharp knife along the edges of the remaining stalks to remove any thorns, and scrape off any strings. Cut the cleaned stalks into 3-inch pieces, and immediately plunge them into the lemon water so they don't discolor. Place them in the refrigerator for several hours or until ready to cook.

Remove the cardoons from the refrigerator, and place the contents (including the lemon water in a large pot). Add enough extra water to cover, a handful of salt, and bring to a boil. The cooking time can vary from 15 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the toughness of the cardoons. Taste one from time to time to see if they are tender. When they are cooked drain them.

While they are cooking, prepare a marinade of olive oil, the juice from the other half of lemon, chopped parsley, and 1 teaspoon salt. Submerge the hot cardoons into the marinade for at least 1 hour.

For the Fritter Batter

In a large bowl, beat the eggs until frothy. Sift in the flour, add the salt and cayenne, and continue beating with a whisk until the batter is smooth. Beat in just enough of the heavy cream to make a thick batter. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 2 hours. You can do this while the cardoons are soaking in the refrigerator.

Frying and Serving the Cardoons

Heat the oil in a deep fryer or deep pot to 375°. While it is heating, drain the cardoons from the marinade, and pat them dry with paper towels.

When the oil is hot, dip the cardoons in the fritter batter, letting the excess drip off. Place just a few at a time in the hot oil, and fry, stirring until they are golden brown on all sides. Drain them on paper towels. Continue frying the remaining cardoons.

Heap the cardoons on a platter. Sprinkle them liberally with salt, and serve them hot with lemon wedges. Leftover cardoons can be reheated in a 350° oven for ten minutes, but they will not have the same crispness.