

Cucina Della Terra

Gerri Sarnataro, Owner and Chef/Instructor

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Dear Friends & Food Lovers,

Finding locally grown foods in any region of Italy doesn't take much effort, but knowing what to do with them requires a bit of education. Consider the artichoke. Across from my cooking school *Cucina Della Terra* in Umbria, Italy is my neighbor, Mauro. Artichoke plants dot his yard like ornamental shrubs. As I watched these perennial plants develop through the seasons, I was astonished to see dozens of flowering artichokes past their prime. When I asked him why he didn't harvest them, he sheepishly admitted that he didn't have a clue how to prepare them. His hobby



was riding his Harley-Davidson not prying leaves off a prickly vegetable! When he discovered that I was a chef/instructor, he invited me to take as many as I desired.

To avoid Mauro's missed opportunities, here are some tips on purchasing and preparing artichokes...

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PURCHASING ARTICHOKE

When purchasing artichokes in American markets look for buds with closed leaves. The artichoke should feel firm and look a beautiful green without dark or discolored soft spots.

ARTICHOKE PREPARATION

To prepare artichokes for frying, braising or roasting:

1. Break off the leaves or scales starting from the outside. Bend the leaves back until they break off at the base. Discard
2. Continue until you reach the yellow interior leaves.
3. Using a sharp knife, cut off the top stopping at the point where you can see the fuzzy purple-tinged “choke” which is inedible.
4. Using a melon ball scoop scrape out the fuzzy leaves and discard. Rub a cut lemon all over the cut portion of the artichoke to prevent graying.
5. Using your paring knife, trim the outside of the base removing all the tough green leaves. Pare off the dark, green woody portion on the stem stopping when you begin to see a creamy white color.
6. Keep the cut artichokes in ice water until you are ready to use them. They may be cut into quarters for frying or roasting, kept whole for braising or sliced thinly for raw salads.

Look for my next newsletter when I’ll offer a recipe for the most delicious artichoke pizza.

