

## CARDOONS

A member of the sunflower family, and very similar to artichokes, cardoons come from the Mediterranean. In ancient times, they were shipped by enterprising farmers to markets from Carthage and Caesarea. Roman nobles served the stalks stewed in fish sauce, while peasants ate the stalks bitter and raw. Tucked amid pepper and spices, knights brought cardoons back to England from the Holy Land. While the British admired the lovely blue flowers, cardoons as a food never quite caught on in northern Europe. New England colonists, on the other hand, grateful for anything edible, loved cardoons. They stewed them, baked them au gratin and fried them in butter. Today, cardoons are very popular in southern Italy, France and Spain, and can be found on many menus in Rome.

The growing process is labor intensive, as the stalks are bound together with twine and wrapped in burlap for at least one month prior to harvest. **The leaves are lined with very sharp thorns, so use care when handling them.** Although a bit complicated to prepare, cardoon stalks are a divine treat with ancient gastronomic roots.

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### BASIC PREPARATION

With a sharp knife, strip away stringy fibers from 2 pounds of blanched cardoon stalks. Cut into 2inch pieces and place in a pot of boiling salted water along with 1/2 cup lemon juice or vinegar. Lower heat and simmer until cardoon pieces are tender, between 20 and 30 minutes. Drain and cool. The cardoons are now ready for use.

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### Cardoons – Nuovo Romano

1/3 cup flour  
olive oil for frying  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon ground pepper

Place flour, salt and pepper in a paper bag. Add cardoon pieces and shake until coated. Fill a heavy frying pan with 1/2 inch of olive oil and warm over moderate heat. Add cardoons and fry until lightly browned. With a slotted spoon, remove from heat and blot with paper towels. Serve warm with bagna cauda dipping sauce, below.

### Bagna Cauda Dipping Sauce

1/2 cup melted butter  
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil  
1 head of garlic, drizzled with oil  
and baked in foil for 30 minutes  
2 ounces anchovy filets (salt cured is best, but canned, well drained filets will work)

Peel the garlic and drop cloves into a blender or food processor. Add remaining ingredients and process until smooth. Serve warm.

More recipes on other side...

**Creamy Cardoon and Pumpkin Soup**

2 cups prepared cardoons

3 tablespoons butter or margarine

1/2 cups minced onions

1 clove garlic, thinly sliced

1 cup pumpkin puree (ambercup or baby sugar works best)

1 tablespoon minced fresh sage (or 1/2 teaspoon dried)

4 cups vegetable or chicken stock

1/4 cup evaporated milk or light cream

toasted pumpkin seeds (see our *pepitas* recipe on winter squash recipe page)

fresh sage sprigs

In a heavy saucepan, saute the onions in butter until transparent; do not allow them to brown. Add garlic and stir one minute. Add cardoons, stock and sage. Bring to a boil, lower heat and simmer 10 minutes. Allow to cool. Puree cardoon mixture in a blender and strain through a sieve to remove any fibers. Return to the stove, stir in pumpkin puree and reheat. Add cream and season to taste. Cook over low heat until hot but not boiling. Serve the cardoons garnished with pumpkin seeds (*pepitas*) and a small sprig of sage.

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