

FIRSTS

# Sensuous Summer Thistles

BY LYNETTE LA MERE



Just the thought of celebrating spring and all its delicacies intoxicates me. I can't help it. Right when I've accepted being cold most of the time and settled for the dull squashes and veggies of inter, nothing sounds more enticing than spring's abundance. Like me, globe artichokes, those sensuous, locally grown thistles, are at their finest in spring.

A native of the Mediterranean (and the official vegetable of Monterey, California) the artichoke is a perennial in the thistle group of the sunflower family. The "vegetable" that we eat is actually the plant's flower bud. In full growth, the plant spreads to cover an area about six feet in diameter and reaches a height of three to four feet. Its long, arching, deeply serrated leaves give the plant a fern-like appearance. Brought to American soil in the 1800s, now nearly one hundred percent of all artichokes grown commercially in the United States are grown in California where they flourish in the Mediterranean climate of our central coast.

In Ancient Greece, the artichoke was attributed to being effective in securing the birth of a son. They are often considered an aphrodisiac—and are fun to eat and a good source of vitamin C and potassium. They're low in sodium, fat-free, average 25 calories and act as a diuretic. An artichoke also contains cynarin which stimulates bile secretion in the liver and acts as a liver tonic, protecting the liver against toxins and is reputed to stimulate the generation of liver cells. Cynarin is said to have a moderating effect on blood cholesterol levels also.

Artichokes of all sizes are gorgeous additions to oral centerpieces too: just extend the stem with a wooden skewer. I also hollow out the centers of raw large artichokes, level off the bottoms and sink in festive candles for buffets or grilled veggie platters. Here are a few other ideas if you've got a hankering for a sensuous thistle.

## Artichoke Pie

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 (6-ounce) cans artichoke hearts, drained
- 1/2 cup Italian seasoned bread crumbs
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese, divided
- 1 unbaked 9-inch pie crust
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 (8-ounce) package mozzarella cheese, shredded

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté garlic until it starts to brown. Stir in artichoke hearts and cook 10 minutes before adding bread crumbs and half of the parmesan cheese. When heated through, transfer half of the artichoke mixture to pie crust.

Pour eggs over artichoke mixture and sprinkle the rest of the parmesan cheese. Spoon the rest of the artichoke mixture into the pie and top with mozzarella cheese. Bake in preheated oven for 45 minutes, or until crust begins to brown.

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### Baby Artichokes

(4 servings)

- 12 to 18 baby artichokes, trimmed to edible stage
- 1 lemon
- 1 small onion, coarsely chopped
- 3 clove garlic, chopped
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 Tb. each sweet basil and marjoram
- Salt and pepper

To trim the babies, bend back the outer green leave and snap them off at the base. Continue doing this until you reach a point where the leaves are half green (at the top) and half yellow. Cut the top cone of leaves at the point where the yellow color meets the green. (Green will be fibrous.)

Remove or peel the stem. Halve artichokes and let stand in cold water and juice of a lemon about 10 minutes. Drain well.

In a heavy frying pan sauté artichokes, onion and garlic in olive oil until golden. Add broth, basil and marjoram. Cover and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce to low and simmer, covered, 10 to 15 minutes or until tender. Salt and pepper to taste.

### Artichokes with Olives and Parmesan

*Hands down, this is an all time favorite of mine; it's one of those recipes that define culinary art that goes straight to the heart. Promise you'll only make it for people you genuinely love, no one else deserves it.*

*This is for four, but leftovers are almost better the next day for picnic or lunch food.*

- 4 large artichokes, stems removed flush
- 2 lemons, halved
- 4 cloves garlic
- 1 Tb. salt
- 2 Tb. olive oil

Cover the trimmed artichokes with water in a large pot, squeeze in and add the peel of 3 of the lemon halves, toss in the garlic, salt and oil. Boil until an outer leaf will come off when pulled with tongs 35 minutes to an hour. Drain upside down while whisking together the dressing ingredients. Plate the warm artichokes upright and fan open the leaves a bit. Pour over the dressing evenly and top with the reserved Parmesan.

#### DRESSING:

- Juice of half of one of the lemons
- 1 t. sherry vinegar
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 t. Dijon mustard
- 1/4 t. pepper
- 2 shallots, minced
- 1/4 cup oil cured olives, pitted & chopped
- 1/2 cup fresh grated Parmesan-Reggiano (2 Tb. in dressing, use the rest to sprinkle on top)



## FIRSTS

### Lemon Parmesan Artichoke Bottoms

*Pure Joy Catering's most popular appetizer. On this one I've got to say canned artichoke bottoms are the way to go or you'll be in the kitchen cursing me all day. That said, you must get Maria's brand artichoke bottoms, the others are too tough. These are great with cocktails and you can make them a day ahead and pop them in the oven when you like. (Makes 30 pieces)*

- 5 cans Maria's brand **artichoke bottoms**  
(not hearts)
- 3 cloves **garlic**, minced fine
- 1/4 pound (1.5 cups) grated **Parmesan**  
(not the salty powdered kind)
- 1/2 cup **mayonnaise**
- 1-1/2 t. **lemon juice**
- 1 packed t. of **lemon zest**
- 1/4 t. **pepper**

#### GARNISH:

- 1/4 cup toasted **pine nuts** & minced **fresh parsley**

Drain the artichoke bottoms, pat dry and trim the bottoms of them so they sit level & are tender. Spray a cookie sheet or baking pan with vegetable oil. Blend the ingredients together in a bowl. Sit the bottoms on the cookie sheet and season them with salt & pepper then fill them, top each one with 3 toasted pine nuts. You can cover and hold them at this point or bake at 375 degrees for about 30 minutes, till golden on top. Sprinkle with minced parsley.

### Artichokes Benedict

*For four lucky folks, what could be better? (Oh, I know! Blood Orange Mimosas too!)*

- 4 large **artichokes**
- 4 thick slices **Canadian bacon**
- 4 Lily's Farm Fresh **eggs**

#### BLENDER HOLLANDAISE SAUCE:

Blend 3 egg yolks, 2 tablespoons lemon juice and 1/4 t. salt in electric blender. Using low speed, slowly add 1/2 cup hot melted butter. To keep warm, pour into heat-proof dish and cover. Then place in saucepan of hot water. Stir occasionally. If sauce thickens too much, add 1 or 2 teaspoons water; beat until smooth. Takes about 1 cup.

Cut the artichoke stems off at the base and remove the small bottom leaves. Stand artichokes upright in deep saucepan large enough to hold snugly. Add 1 teaspoon salt to 2 to 3 inches boiling water. Cover and boil gently 35 to 45 minutes or until base can be pierced easily with fork. (Add a little more boiling water if needed.) Turn artichokes upside down to drain.

Spread leaves open like flower petals. Carefully remove center petals and fuzzy centers from artichoke bottoms with a spoon and discard; keep artichoke stems. Brown Canadian bacon slices in skillet. Poach eggs in boiling, salted water. Place bacon slices into artichoke centers, covering bottom, and top with poached eggs. Spoon on Hollandaise Sauce and serve immediately.



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# LET THEM EAT CRAB!

BY LYNETTE LA MERE



James Beard described crab as a 'meal the gods intended only for the pure in palate.' Everyone loves eating these bizarre ten legged crustaceans once they get going. Its fun, fresh, delicious, light fare, although cooking fresh crabs can be a bit intimidating to the home cook, they're very easy to prepare and make a good Saturday afternoon leisurely project. Head to the pier, Farmer's Market or one of the local fish merchants and figure on getting 20 to 25% cooked crab meat from each pound of whole, raw crab you buy. Use live crabs on the same day purchased. Simply tell the gang we've over eaten all the easy things and it's time to earn dinner!

The real news is that Crab is still an environmentally sound seafood source and a good toxin free food as long as you don't eat the organs or viscera. These hearty fellows are flourishing like the spiders in Montecito. Both the National Resources Defense Council and Environmental Defense give eating crabs the thumbs up. Red, brown and yellow Rock crabs and Spider Crabs are more abundant than ever on our coastline and are available year round and can be had for an average of 3.95 a pound from the local fish market. Dungeness crab, Blue crab, Snow crab and Alaskan king crab cost more but they have more accessible meat, meaning they're a bit less work.

Whole crabs are best boiled in a large pot of salted water (shoot for a saltiness similar to that of the ocean), after it returns to a boil cook them for 15 to 25 minutes depending on the size of the crabs. If dropping live crabs into boiling water bothers you, try freezing them first for an hour, apparently it stuns or numbs them. When their done pull off the back and clean the viscera out under a heavy stream of water, melt some butter, toss a salad, spread out some newspapers on the table, a nut cracker & dinner is served.

Supermarket variety canned crab tends to get poor reviews and I can't recommend it. If you'd like to try some of these recipes without cooking the fresh crabs first I suggest going to the Harbor & getting some cleaned shelled, fresh local crab from the guys here at the Santa Barbara Fish Market, Brian says they often have spider crab shelled now and that's delicious. The canned jumbo lump crab by Chicken of the Sea is very good too.

#### NOT CRAB AND ARTICHOKE DIP

This recipe is the reason I started this column, people keep asking me for it, I know its old school but here's a reason it's still around, people devour it.

(continued)



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12 oz. Artichoke hearts, not marinated  
 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped  
 2 Tb. butter  
 2 Tb. flour  
 1-1/4 cup half & half  
 3 green onions, sliced thin  
 2 oz parmesan cheese  
 1-1/2 tsp. lemon juice  
 1-1/2 Tb. pickled jalapeños, minced  
 1/2 tsp. salt  
 1/4 tsp. celery seed  
 1 pound crab meat, picked over  
 1/4 tsp. pepper

Top garnish;  
 2 oz. additional parmesan cheese

Drain the artichoke hearts well and finely chop them. Sauté bell peppers five minutes and set aside. Make a roux with flour and butter. Just cook it down in a sauté pan until deep gold, add the half & half and then reduce to thicken. Gently stir together the rest in the order given off the heat. Transfer to a vegetable sprayed or buttered six cup baking/ serving vessel, and top with additional parmesan cheese garnish. You can hold it here in the refrigerator to bake later if you'd like. Bake at 375 degrees for 20-30 minutes or till bubbly & golden.

### BEAUTIFUL CRAB AND BLOOD ORANGE SALAD

4 generous entrée servings

With pale butter lettuce as a back drop this is a gorgeous meal and the dressing is very popular; a wonderful showcase for our locally grown blood oranges but if you can't get them regular oranges will do fine.

2 large heads butter lettuce, washed, dried and torn  
 1 lb. crab meat, picked over  
 4 blood oranges, peel & pith cut off, sections gently cut out  
 2 ripe avocados  
 Blood Orange Vinaigrette (recipe follows)

Toss the lettuce with Orange Vinaigrette (you'll have some left over; it holds well) and top with crab, orange sections and avocado slices. Season lightly with salt & pepper.

### BLOOD ORANGE VINAIGRETTE

Makes 3 cups.

Before you juice the oranges remove 2 teaspoons of the zest with a microplane zester.

1 cup fresh squeezed blood orange juice  
 1/2 cup rice wine vinegar  
 1/4 cup frozen orange juice concentrate  
 1/4 cup honey  
 2 Tb. Dijon mustard  
 1 tsp. allspice  
 1 tsp. salt  
 1/2 tsp. pepper

1-1/3 cup vegetable oil  
 2 tsp. blood orange zest

Put all the ingredients in a blender and emulsify for several minutes.

### CRAB ENCHILADAS & SALSA VERDE

12 oz. crab meat, picked over  
 1 bunch green onions, chopped  
 3 oz. Monterey jack cheese  
 12 corn tortillas  
 Salsa Verde (recipe follows)

Garnish;  
 8 oz. sour cream  
 1 bu. Cilantro

Blend together the crab, green onions and cheese. Heat the salsa verde in a sauté pan and dip the tortillas in with tongs to soften them filling and rolling them up one by one. Set them out seam side down in a baking pan lined with a thin layer of the salsa. Top with more salsa and more jack cheese if you like and bake in a 350 degree oven till hot, about 20 minutes. Serve with sour cream and cilantro garnish.

### SALSA VERDE

Quick and easy to prepare; far superior to the canned or jarred variety.

2 lb. tomatillos, remove the loose skins and boil ten minutes  
 3 Serrano chilies (for less heat use 2)  
 1 bu. cilantro  
 1 clove garlic  
 pinch salt

Drain the tomatillos, coarsely chop the rest of the ingredients and process in a blender.

### CRAB AND WILD MUSHROOM TORTE

An outstanding dish with cocktails, serve warm or room temperature with lots of sliced baguettes and a crisp white wine. Also decadent in wedges with a salad.

For the Crust;

1 3/4 cup fresh French bread crumbs  
 1 cup (3oz) parmesan, grated  
 6 Tb. butter, melted

For the Filling;

1 Tb. olive oil to sauté  
 1 cup chopped onion  
 1 cup chopped red bell pepper  
 4 cup (.65lb) wild mushrooms, remove stems and chop.  
 1.5 lb cream cheese, room temperature  
 2 tsp. salt  
 1 tsp. pepper  
 4 eggs  
 1/2 cup cream  
 10 oz. crab meat, picked over  
 4 oz. smoked Gouda, grated  
 1/2 cup fresh parsley

For after baking top crust;  
 1/4 cup each; parmesan, parsley & bread crumbs

Pre heat the oven to 350 degrees, vegetable spray a 9x2 inch spring form pan. Blend together the crust and press into the bottom of the pan only and prebake it for 10 minutes, and then cool.

Sauté the onion and pepper for 2 minutes, add the mushrooms, and continue to sauté for 10 minutes and then cool.

Beat cream cheese and salt & pepper until fluffy. Add the eggs and cream. Fold in the sautéed mushrooms, onions and peppers Gouda, crab and parsley. Pour over the crust Bake on a baking sheet for 1 hour and 30 minutes until cake puffs and browns well on top but still moves in center slightly when shaken. Remove from the oven for a moment and top with top crust. Pop it back in the oven till done another ten minutes. This can be served or refrigerated and holds well and served later at room temperature.

### COOKIE'S CRAB AIOLI

1 Cup Mayonnaise  
 3 teaspoons of Colman's Dry Mustard  
 2 teaspoons Worcestershire Sauce  
 1 teaspoon A-1 Steak sauce  
 1/8 cup Half & Half  
 Salt to taste.

Whip mayonnaise and mustard for two minutes. Add Worcestershire and A-1 sauce, mix thoroughly, then add half & half and salt. Continue to mix until well blended and then chill overnight.

**The Spicy Version:** Prepare as above, adding a finely chopped, medium size jalapeno pepper with the salt and cream.



# EASY SUMMER SALADS

Sometimes it's a friend I miss; just longing to sit & catch up that makes me start planning a menu and ringing up a dinner party. Other times it's the food; the peaches as they come into their own in the summertime with their amazing smell, or the local white nectarines, or a craving for really good English cheddar. I like to gather on the porch and play cards after the sun has set and these are a few of my favorite dishes to pull together for those times. —LLM

## WHITE NECTARINE SALSA

1.5 quarts

The secret here is to get the nectarines at least two days ahead so they ripen, you can smell when they're perfect (ripen out of the frig of course). This is my new fav with everything from salmon to lamb. It's nice and light as sauces can go and super tasty. This recipe will work brilliantly with peaches, bosc pears, mangos, grapes or any nice ripe fruit.

3 pasilla chilies

4 white nectarines

3 jalapenos

1 small red onion

1 small bunch cilantro

3 limes, juiced

6 cloves roasted garlic,

or 3 raw, minced

splash of olive oil

salt and pepper to taste

I roast the pasillas over the open flame on my stove top or grill turning on each side with tongs till charred well then pop them hot into a plastic bag, twist tight and let them steam a while. Fine dice everything else (I ditch the seeds and veins of the jalapenos). Toss it all together and serve.

## MIXED GREENS SALAD WITH PEACHES, GORGONZOLA AND TOASTED ALMONDS

Dressing:

Juice of 2 limes

Juice of 1 orange

1/4 cup almond, hazelnut

or walnut oil

1/2 tsp. salt and a few grinds

of pepper

Slowly whisk the oil into the juices. Add the salt and pepper.

Salad:

1/4 cup sliced almonds

4 medium peaches

8 cups mixed greens; red leaf, oak leaf, romaine, spinach, arugula, etc., cleaned and torn

3 oz gorgonzola, crumbled

Lightly toast almonds by baking on sheet pan 5 minutes 350 degrees. Peel and cut into 1/4 inch slices. In a small bowl, combine dressing and peaches and marinate for ten minutes. Distribute greens on individual salad plates. Top with peach segments. Drizzle with the dressing and sprinkle with gorgonzola and almonds.

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*Lynette La Mere is the proprietor and Executive Chef of Pure Joy Catering, Inc (805) 963-5766 ([www.PureJoyCatering.com](http://www.PureJoyCatering.com)) and a freelance writer who flourishes in Santa Barbara. Ingredients for both salads can be found at Whole Foods Market and Farmer's Market*