

Stuffed Artichokes for Millennials Harmed by Structural Failure

written by Guest Contributor | January 21, 2019



This is cooking for abandoned hopes. For the path that fails or, rather, fails you. I am not sure what generational identity or identifying can do for us at this stage. Haven't we already lost more than we had at the beginning? Is it maybe our birthright to lose? But to lose beautifully, with a basket of vegetables and a sense that the moment may be more important than the savings account for now. What can \$20 here or there do against a tidal wave of debt? A contract that isn't renewed? The smiles of boomer employers that become frowns or, more likely, simply disappear? The emails gone unanswered. The degrees unused and unpaid for. The millennial hit piece your Uncle posts and your Mother likes. Does this sound familiar?

If it does, find a pot.

It will need to be a large pot. The biggest one you have probably unless some caring relative has given you their massive stockpot. The one still bearing the scars of all the lobsters and marrow bones it has ushered to the next consumable state of being. The sort of pot you would use for pasta. Get that out. You will not need many ingredients for this dish, but it will turn out so well you will want company. A lover, ideally. A wife or husband or partner if you've been so lucky. Yourself, if you've been a different sort of lucky. Friends too. Neighbors even. But you need artichokes. Budget about \$10-15 for four artichokes. You may get lucky and find them much cheaper. You may live in New York City and spend what they ask and take what you can get. Artichokes can be cheap because so many people have no idea how to open them. You are not going to be that sort of person. Do not buy baby artichokes, though they will sing to you in their clamshell plastic cases or in beautifully arranged baskets. They are decorative and useless like so many of your dreams may seem as you bring these artichokes home.

There are some non-negotiable items: bread crumbs, garlic, and olive oil. Fresh garlic is probably best but if you have dried garlic or garlic in a jar, do you. Mix these ingredients into a sandy paste, bread crumbs should form the bulk of it, then a teaspoon or three of garlic and enough olive oil to bring it together. Salt and pepper of course. Cheese, parmesan or pecorino only, if you have it. Fresh parsley if you buy a beautiful bunch and let it sit in the top of your grocery bag. Never dried parsley, it's worthless. Dried oregano is ok. You may also, if you eat it and you feel you deserve it, add ground up sausage. If you can only find links of sausage, and this

happens more often than you'd think, take your sharpest knife and slit down the sausage casing, liberating the meat inside. It will feel visceral and a bit messy, but it'll be very good. Mix all of it into a bread crumb laden paste and set aside.

Now the artichokes. They are beautiful things, layered and spiked. Rigid with petals inside like an inside-out flower. Their most beautiful part, the delicate yet rigid choke, is also the most useless. So many of your beautiful parts are useless too. Cut the top of the artichoke off, about an inch and a half. You'll see the explosion of purple and white. Scoop it out with a spoon or paring knife. Trim the artichoke's stem and peel the thick skin away. This will become part of the most delicious section of the artichoke. Trim any of the sharp points of the firm outer petals, unless you don't care about the risk. Prepare a bowl of water with the juice of a lemon or two, big enough to submerge the artichokes. Leave the lemons floating in the bath with the artichokes. Parts of it will turn black anyway, parts of it were always black. It's not really your fault. You can't help the way things decay. You can only take what you can.

Take that largest pot you have. Fill it with about 3 inches or so of water. Then stuff your artichokes with the sandy filling. You want to fill the empty center cavity completely. Then, spread the remaining petals and shove the crumb mixture in between them so the artichoke looks like a sandy flower. Position them, stuffed side up in the pot and then throw any remaining bread crumb mixture over all of them. Then, bless them with a glug of olive oil if you have it and put the lid on. Turn the burner to high until the water starts to boil and then turn it down so you have constant steaming. This may take a while. I wish I could tell you the timeline of success, but I can't. You'll know they're done when you can pull a petal off easily and when you drag your teeth against the inside the flesh pulls away tender and delicious. Allow about 40 minutes. Be patient and resolved. Don't accept anyone's version (even mine) of what the timeline for success should be.

When they are done, I am afraid there is more waiting. Put them in a tray or dish with sides. Whatever you have that can hold the artichokes and their cooking liquid. Position the artichokes face up and then pour the cooking liquid, thickened and enriched almost like a miracle by the breadcrumbs which have fallen off the petals, over the whole dish. Let it cool for about a half an hour.

As it cools, you have some options. Wine would be classic, even the cheapest bottles of white or rosé, even that bottle of André your friend brought from the gas station, all is fair game here, but you need something to turn this meal into a sacrament. Vodka rocks. Even water with lemon. Something. I think a dish like this is meant for two, though it can serve more. Sitting with someone as you eat the filling and then scrape each petal into your mouth is a way to make moments go slow, to ignore the emails that come or don't come. The calls you wish had come. The social media updates that tell you life is a game played with different chances. Yet even the rich buy these same artichokes. There are no others.

When your plate is a mosaic of petals, you'll have only the heart left. This

is the best part, so douse it in new oil and salt and lemon, or even butter and enjoy it slowly. When your friend has finished and you too are done, stay at the table. If your friend has brought berries or pastry, that is a blessing. If not, find some cookies in a cupboard, even if they're a bit stale. Or just pour more wine, some gin with lime, or, maybe, nothing more, just the window and a bird singing in the distance.



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