

Artichokes: A Fun, Quick & Healthy Veggie

(NAPSA)—If you're looking for something to liven up your meal, artichokes offer a terrific, tasty solution. This culinary favorite is fun to eat, can be quick to prepare and completes a "green serving" of the 5 a Day the Color Way regimen.

Besides being delicious, artichokes are naturally low in sodium and have no fat or cholesterol.



Pivonka

They're a rich source of vitamin C, folate and dietary fiber.

There are several ways to enjoy artichokes; they can be steamed, boiled, grilled, sautéed or roasted. But for any-

one who is short on time, artichokes have a speedy cooking time in the microwave, making them a wonderful quick-meal solution.

To Microwave: Place one rinsed and trimmed artichoke upside down in a glass bowl with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon each of lemon juice and oil. Cover with plastic wrap and cook on high 7 to 10 minutes. Time can vary depending on size of artichoke.

When shopping for artichokes, select ones that squeak with a squeeze of the leaves for freshness and pick artichokes with thorned petals, as those varieties have a bigger, meatier heart. Just trim the thorns with scissors when ready to prepare. The "jumbo"-sized artichoke is a culinary favorite and can be found in your local market throughout the year.

Artichokes will keep for about a week in a plastic bag stored in your refrigerator. Their peak seasons are spring and fall, but new varieties developed by Ocean Mist are available year-round.

To eat, pull the base of each petal through your front teeth to strip off the "meat," then discard the rest. The artichoke's center "heart" is often considered the tastiest part and the prize of your work. The stem is an extension of the heart and also completely edible and delicious.

For more information about artichokes online, visit www.oceanmist.com or www.artichokes.org. For more information on the 5 A Day the Color Way plan, visit www.5aday.org.

Artichokes' sweet, mild flavor make them a marvelous partner



for dips and sauces, such as this quick-to-make Balsamic Mint Dressing.

Artichokes with Balsamic Mint Dressing

Recipe courtesy of Ocean Mist

- 4 extra large or jumbo artichokes**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed fresh mint leaves**
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup balsamic vinegar**
- 3 tablespoons honey**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**

Rinse artichokes under running water. Cut off stem and top quarter of artichoke. Trim tips of petals with kitchen scissors, if desired. Pour 3 inches of water in large pot. Add artichokes and simmer, covered, until a petal pulls out easily, about 45 minutes, depending on size. Drain artichokes upside down on paper towels. Using a large spoon, scoop out and discard the soft inner leaves and fuzzy choke. Arrange artichokes in serving bowl, cup side up. In a blender or food processor, blend remaining ingredients. Pour balsamic honey mixture into the centers of the artichokes. Serve warm, at room temperature or chilled. Makes 8 shared appetizer servings.

Nutrition Information per Serving: calories: 106, total fat: 3.5g, saturated fat: 0.5g, % of calories from fat: 26%, % of calories from saturated fat: 4%, protein: 4g, carbohydrates: 19g, cholesterol: 0mg, dietary fiber: 5g, sodium: 276mg

Note to Editors: *Eighty-seventh in a series of columns by Elizabeth Pivonka, Ph.D., R.D., president and CEO of Produce for Better Health Foundation. More stories at www.napsnet.com. Search: "Pivonka."*