

RV GODDESS: Artichoke & Spinach Manicotti

This recipe makes a lovely light filling for manicotti - and will also work well for stuffing giant shells or layering in lasagna. The filling can be made one day in advance. Easiest way to stuff the manicotti? Never cook manicotti according to the package directions - leave it a little more than "al dente" and the pasta tubes will be much easier to fill and less-likely to split. The pasta will finish cooking during baking. Place the filling in a heavy plastic bag (I use a gallon-size Ziploc bag), snip off the bottom corner for a half-inch opening and pipe the filling into the cooked manicotti tubes. Use a small spoon to compress the stuffing and fill the tubes completely. It makes no difference if you purchase chopped or whole spinach, whole artichoke hearts or quarters - it is all going into the food processor.

- 1 (8 ounce) package manicotti pasta tubes (12 tubes)
- 1 Tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 2-3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 10 ounce frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 13 ounce can/jar artichoke hearts in water (not marinated), drained and rinsed
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley leaves
- 2-3 sprigs fresh oregano leaves (or 2 teaspoons dried oregano)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Black pepper, to taste
- One egg (or two egg whites)
- 15 ounce ricotta cheese (I use low fat)
- 1/2 cup shredded parmesan cheese
- One jar (28-32 ounce) of your favorite marinara sauce
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella
- 2 teaspoons dried herbs - oregano, basil, or Italian seasoning as garnish (optional)

Cook manicotti pasta in a large pot of boiling, salted water. (See note above about cooking time.) Drain, rinse carefully in cold water and leave to dry on a towel.

Heat a small skillet, add the olive oil, onion and garlic. Sauté a few minutes over medium heat, until the onion is soft and just starting to brown. Place the onion mixture in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Add the spinach, artichoke hearts, oregano leaves, parsley, salt, and pepper to the processor bowl and process until the vegetables are very finely chopped, about thirty seconds, scraping down the bowl once.

Place the egg (or egg whites) in a large bowl. Whip with a whisk to blend well. Whisk-in the ricotta cheese, then stir-in the parmesan cheese. Add the spinach-artichoke mixture to the bowl and stir with a spoon until filling is smooth and well blended.

Heat oven to 375°. Oil a shallow baking dish large enough to hold the stuffed manicotti in one layer. Pipe or spoon filling carefully into the cooked manicotti tubes. Lay the manicotti tightly together in the baking dish. Pour the marinara sauce over the stuffed tubes, making sure sauce covers all the manicotti. Sprinkle the shredded mozzarella cheese over all and top with a few dried herbs as garnish, if desired.

Bake for 40-45 minutes, or until the cheese is browned and pasta filling is bubbly. Let rest for five minutes before serving. This recipe makes enough filling for about twelve manicotti shells - which is usually about how many manicotti shells come in a package. Serves 6.