



From the Kitchen of Executive Chef Jessica VanRoo

Baked Artichoke and Spinach Polenta With Gruyère

Serves 5

276 calories per serving

Description from Living Well UCI Health Blog: www.ucihealth.org/blog

This tasty casserole has the comfort food creaminess we all crave during the holidays yet is packed with vital nutrients.

When thinking of cooked grains, oatmeal, rice or quinoa usually jump to mind. But polenta — made by cooking yellow cornmeal in salted water — is another grain worth getting to know. When the cornmeal absorbs water, it softens and turns into a creamy, porridge-like dish.

Polenta also happens to be a gluten-free, complex carbohydrate that is full of fiber and some protein, both of which help you feel full longer. It's also inexpensive, simple to prepare, extremely versatile and easily enhanced with herbs, spices and grated cheese. Artichokes — a type of thistle that originated in the Mediterranean region — have been prized for centuries for their potential medicinal properties. They are low in fat and high in fiber — one medium artichoke contains almost 7 grams of fiber, a whopping 23% to 28% of the amount recommended daily! They also provide high levels of folate and vitamins C and K, while supplying important minerals such as magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and iron.

Adding spinach boosts the nutrition content even more with high amounts of carotenoids, folic acid, calcium, more vitamin C and K, as well as iron. Spinach also contains these important plant compounds: lutein (linked to eye health), kaempferol (thought to decrease cancer risk and chronic illnesses), nitrates (for heart health) and quercetin, an antioxidant that may ward off infection and inflammation.



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Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon avocado oil, more as needed
- 1 large shallot, finely diced
- 1 large bunch of spinach (about 1 lb)
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic (about 2 large cloves)
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 12 ounces artichoke hearts (frozen or canned and well drained) cut into bite-size pieces
- 18-ounce tube cooked polenta, sliced into ¼-inch-thick rounds
- 3 ounces grated Gruyère cheese (about ¾ cup), divided
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees, coat 8-inch square baking dish with cooking spray or oil and set aside.
2. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. When hot, add shallot and cook for 20 seconds.
3. Add spinach and garlic, cooking just until spinach wilts, about 1-2 minutes.
4. Stir in vinegar and artichoke hearts, turn off heat, taste and season with salt and pepper.
5. Pour mix into baking dish then sprinkle with ½ cup Gruyère.
6. Arrange polenta rounds atop the spinach-artichoke mix, with rounds slightly overlapping.
7. Sprinkle remaining ¼ cup Gruyère and ¼ cup Parmesan cheese over the top.
8. Bake 15 minutes, then broil 2-3 minutes to brown.
9. Cool at least 5 minutes before serving.

Make ahead tips:

- The spinach-artichoke mix can be prepared ahead and stored in freezer for up to two months.
- Assemble all ingredients one day in advance, then keep covered and refrigerated.
- When baking, add 5-8 minutes to total cooking time, making sure internal temperature reaches 165 degrees before serving.