

# Stalk out an Italian favorite



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With their long, spiky, silvery green stalks, cardoons look like celery gone wild. The vegetable is actually a member of the artichoke family, but you don't eat the flowering buds — you eat the stems. They're a favorite in Italian households, but for some reason, many Americans are intimidated by the cardoon's appearance and bitter flavor.

So, let's un-intimidate you with three simple words: peel, slice, boil. Use a paring knife to remove the heavy strings and any leaves.

I cut each stalk into three strips, then slice them into 2-inch pieces. Bring a pot of water and a splash of fresh lemon juice to a boil. Add the cardoons, then simmer 10 to 15 minutes, until barely tender. Drain, rinse — then serve them with a sprinkling of Parmesan. Or battered and fried. Or baked into a cheesy gratin.

Loaded with vitamins B and C, calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium and zinc, cardoons have twice the nutty flavor of artichokes. Most of our cardoons (\$1.49-\$1.69 per pound) are grown

in Salinas and Oxnard. They love cool weather, and their season runs from November to June.  
— *Michael Marks, Correspondent*