



Freshly cut slices of parmigiano-reggiano cheese at the Caseificio Rastelli in Rubbiano di Solignano.

Sformato di carciofi, *artichoke mold*, is actually a cross between a British pudding and a soufflé. It takes time to prepare, but uses fewer eggs than a soufflé and is much easier to cook. It can be served alone, or as a side dish (it is recommended as an accompaniment to the veal scallops on page 129). Sformato is difficult to find in restaurants in the region, but figures prominently in home cooking.

Sformato di Carciofi Artichoke Mold

From Stefano Ferrari of the Antica Trattoria del Cacciatore, Bologna

Serves 4

6 fresh artichoke hearts, or 2 cups puréed frozen or canned artichoke hearts	1 cup béchamel sauce (preparation follows)
Lemon juice	¼ cup grated Parmigiano cheese
2 tablespoons butter, plus extra to prepare the baking pan	2 eggs, separated
	Flour or breadcrumbs to prepare the pan

Preheat the oven to 375°.

If you are using fresh artichokes, remove all their outer leaves by snapping them off above the bottom white part of the leaf. When you have reached the inner "cone," where the leaves are green only at the top 1 inch, cut that top off. Then halve the artichoke vertically, and cut out from each half the small inner leaves and the little hairs (the "beard") beneath them. Pare away some more of the green outer part of the leaves at the base of each half, and cut off the stem. Dribble lemon juice over the prepared artichokes as you complete the others, to keep them from going brown. Cut the artichokes in quarters and boil them for 5 minutes in salted water. Drain well, then sauté them with 2 tablespoons butter in a pan for 5 minutes. Purée the hearts in a food processor or food mill until smooth.

Prepare the béchamel. Mix the artichoke heart purée with the cheese and the béchamel sauce. Beat the egg yolks and add them to the mixture. Whip the egg whites to soft peaks and fold them in. Butter and flour an 8-inch soufflé dish or 4 individual ramekins, and pour the artichoke mixture in. Set the dish in a larger baking dish filled with hot water, and bake for 30 to 40 minutes. The *sformato* should be slightly golden on top.

Leave the *sformato* to cool for about 10 minutes, and then turn it out upside down on a serving dish.

The béchamel:

- 1½ tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup cold milk

Melt the butter in a small saucepan, add the onion, and sauté over very low heat until the onion is soft. Make sure the butter does not brown.

Whisk in the flour, and cook over low heat, stirring constantly, for about 4 minutes, until the paste is smooth.

Gradually whisk in the cold milk, making sure that the sauce is smooth before adding more milk. When all the milk is whisked in, continue to cook the béchamel over low heat, stirring occasionally, until it thickens. The béchamel will be ready to use in about 5 minutes, but in the traditional Italian preparation it is cooked for as long as 30 minutes.