

# *Lasagne con i cardi* - Cardoon lasagna



## **Ingredients:**

Cardoon  
Onion or leek  
Pasta sheets (either homemade or bought)  
Cheese

## For the bechamel:

Butter  
Flour  
Milk  
Nutmeg

Cardoon might be the ugliest / meanest looking vegetable there is. It's full of thorns and discolours easily so it hurts a lot to harvest / clean and afterwards looks like a bunch of celery you forgot about for a few weeks. Fortunately it tastes nice. The flavour is similar to artichoke, which makes a lot of sense since they are closely related.

Start by cleaning the cardoons. We did a lot of the work for you (you're welcome) but there might still be a prickly part here or there. Remove them now before you swallow them later. Also any really sad looking parts can go, as well as really stringy fibers running down the length of the stalks. Cut the cardoon in small pieces. If you cut 'across the grain' you cut any long stringy fibers into small pieces and you're sure they won't bother you. The internet seems to believe it

possible to make this lasagna also with larger pieces of cardoon, which looks beautiful, but i've never tried so no guarantees.

Cardoon is a tough cookie, so you'll need to cook it quite a bit to soften it. I like to cut up a leek or onion, and saute together with the pieces of cardoon for a few minutes, before adding water and salt (or vegetable / chicken broth if you have it) to cover the vegetables. Cover the pan with a lid and boil until the cardoons are pretty soft. Could take as long as an hour. Or two (!), depending on the size of your cardoon pieces.

In the meantime, make a bechamel. The ratio for quite a thin bechamel (=good for lasagna) is 70 grams of butter and 70 grams of flour per liter of milk. For a big lasagna or two smaller you need probably a liter of milk. Melt the butter, let it sizzle but not brown. Add the flour and stir for a few minutes until it smells nice. Then add the milk bit by bit. The mixture will be very thick in the beginning, at which point you can easily get rid of any lumps. Then keep thinning it out. (same trick goes for pancake batter!) When you like the consistency or you're out of milk, let it boil gently for a minute or two. Season with plenty of salt, nutmeg, black pepper and grated parmiggiano. For some reason bechamel always takes more seasoning than you would expect, so don't try to hurry through this step with a few grinds of nutmeg and a pinch of salt. Taste, taste and adjust. There's no beefy *ragu* in this lasagna to cover for a half-assed bechamel.

Once the cardoon is almost soft, remove the lid from the pan and raise the fire so the liquid mostly evaporates. Taste.

Now you can choose to leave the pieces whole, or puree everything. Up to you.

Assembly time. The best part of any lasagna.

Get all you ingredients together:

- Pasta sheets (if you did decide to home-make these, be sure to blanch them before assembling. It actually makes them come out firmer and less mealy in the final lasagna)
- Bechamel
- Cardoon.
  - > For ease of assembly, you can mix the bechamel and the cardoon together. Unless you were fearless and went for the large pieces.
- Cheese. This lasagna likes cheese. And you are not confined to mozzarella/parmiggiano, even though they are both nice. I made one the other day with camembert. (my sincere apologies to any italian readers) I think blue cheese would be nice as well. Or *taleggio*.
- If you want you could hide a slice of cooked ham between two layers.

Start with a bit of bechamel, then just make layers as you please. Make the layer of filling quite thin. You get many bonus points from the lasagna-guru's if yours has many layers. Finish with bechamel and cheese, because it browns so nicely.

Into the oven which was preheated to 200 degrees celsius, and bake for about 45 minutes, until everything is really hot and the top looks delicious.

Waiting time. The worst part of any lasagna.

Everybody knows that lasagna is better if you let it sit for a while before eating. Even better if you make it the day before. But we also know that this is usually too much to ask from your hungry self and your hungry company; so just see how long you can withstand :)

Eet smakelijk!