

HOT SPINACH AND ARTICHOKE DIP

I've always loved to order this as an appetizer at a restaurant. Of course that means that eventually get around to playing with it in the kitchen to create something as good or better than I'm used to ordering. I'm really proud of this one, and I hope you enjoy it too.

INGREDIENTS:

½ box thawed, chopped frozen Spinach (½ - 2/3 cup)
1 box thawed, frozen Artichoke Hearts (1 ½ cups)
6 oz. Cream Cheese
¼ cup Sour Cream
¼ cup Mayonnaise
½ cup grated Parmesan Cheese
½ teaspoon Red Pepper Flakes
¼ teaspoon Salt
¼ teaspoon Garlic Powder

DIRECTIONS:

Boil the spinach and artichoke hearts in 2 cups of water with 2 teaspoons salt until tender and drain. Discard liquid. If you mistakenly bought whole artichoke hearts like I tend to, now is a good time to chop them coarsely.

Heat the cream cheese in the microwave for 1 minute or until hot and soft. Stir in the rest of the ingredients. You can serve it now, but it will be better if you cover it and let it rest for an hour. This allows the spices, particularly the red pepper to meld with the rest of the ingredients. When you are ready to serve it, place it in the microwave for 30 seconds at a time until it is hot.

My favorite way to serve this is in a bread bowl. Divide a batch of dough into thirds, place dough into 6 inch ramekins (or soup bowls) and allow to rise. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 - 25 minutes or until brown. Cool on wire rack. Slice off top and take out the core of the bread, then squeeze the rest of the bread to the sides to seal any holes and make room for more dip! Slice up the bread that you took out and the lid as well. You can even eat the bowl! This recipe makes enough for 2 bread bowls, so slicing up the third bread bowl (the one that doesn't look as good as the other two) works great for serving your guests.

Calories: If you use 1/3 less fat cream cheese, and "lite" sour cream and mayo, the total recipe is around 1200 calories. This recipe makes about 2 ½ cups, so a ½ cup serving is about 240 calories, not counting the bread or chips.