



GREEK HERITAGE COOKING SIMPLIFIED

STORY & PHOTOS BY
DESPINA PANAGAKOS YEARGIN

My name is Despina. I am a writer, blogger and cooking coach. I was born in Greece, and when I was about eight years old, migrated with my family to Australia. Now as members of the immigrant culture in Sydney, where we had joined my mother's relatives, we continued to stay connected to our homeland by cooking the traditional foods of Greece. Following my mother's death a few years later, my sister, father and I embarked on yet another journey, this time to the United States of America. My sister and I have lived longer in the U.S. than we've lived anywhere else in the world, and as immigrants who've worked in and contributed to our communities, we define ourselves as consummate and proud citizens of the melting pot known as America. My sister, Antonia, married a Greek man and they have four beautiful and successful daughters, all of whom love to eat Greek food and continue the

traditions of their parents' native land. They, however, find themselves too busy with careers to continue the cooking traditions. If our kitchen heritage is to survive, then someone has to collect the family recipes, record them, test them and provide instruction. I've been doing this, but there's an additional component that's necessary if these recipes will live on in my nieces' kitchens and dinner tables. The recipes must be easy enough for the girls to prepare in the midst of their hurried and deadline-driven lives. That's the extra ingredient in this collection of traditional recipes. That's how my book-in-progress was born. *"Greek Heritage Cooking Simplified"*. Same ingredients. Simplified method. The following is one example of how easily a traditional recipe can be converted to deliver the same delicious outcome, but with much less time and stress in the kitchen.

Photos by Despina Panagakos Yeargin



My mother would prepare this stew back when the artichokes were cleaned by hand. There was no option. It was a different time in the Greek Heritage Kitchen. Women went to work at home, cleaning, washing clothes, hanging sheets to dry in the sun, baking bread daily, tending to the vegetable garden and maneuvering around the artichokes with a tiny knife. Getting the tough outer leaves off, cutting the spiky tips, removing the tough exterior of the stalk and reaching in to scoop out the choke was quite a commitment. Today we can still do that, but now we have options. We can simplify the original recipe to include frozen artichoke hearts and lima beans. Harvested at the peak of their growing cycle and frozen, these vegetables come very close to the flavor of their fresh relatives. I may invest in cleaning artichokes for a slow cooked leg of lamb, but when I'm craving artichokes, I prepare this classic dish with their frozen counterparts, the Greek Heritage Cooking Simplified way.

This dish and many other stewed vegetable dishes provide a healthy and hearty summer dinner. In the Greek Heritage Kitchen, they are listed as Lathera, which translates rather poorly as "oily dishes." Although the amount of olive oil seems excessive, it combines with the water and tomatoes and elevates the pan juices to the essence of summertime. We also now know of the health benefits of extra-virgin olive oil, so there is no need to be afraid, after all, one half cup of olive oil is only six tablespoons of oil. That's one tablespoon of oil per person in a recipe which yields six or more servings, even less if served as a side dish. Stop worrying. This stew is the main course, served with French bread, Kalamata olives and Feta cheese on the side. Many people with Western tastes and habits will prefer to serve it as a side dish. In the Greek Heritage Kitchen, and in my home, this is the star of the meal.



ARTICHOKE & LIMA BEAN STEW

INGREDIENTS

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 large sweet onion like Vidalia, chopped (about 2 cups)
2 teaspoons salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
20 oz Fordhook lima beans, frozen (usually in 10 oz packs)
16-18 oz artichoke hearts, frozen (usually in 8 or 9 oz packs)
1 can diced tomatoes with juice
1/3 cup chopped fresh dill
3 cups water

To Finish:

2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
3-4 fresh green onions, sliced

METHOD

1. Heat a large covered pot over medium-high heat. Pour in the oil, and add the onions and salt. The salt will help the onion to render its sugary notes and soften.
2. When the onion is ready, add the artichokes and lima beans (still frozen) and the remaining ingredients. Stir lightly and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and cover with the lid.
3. About 30 minutes later, check to make sure everything is tender. Stir in the reserved dill and green onions and cook about ten minutes more.

By Despina Panagakos Yeargin Instagram: [@despidoodle](https://www.instagram.com/despidoodle)
 Website: www.alphagoodcookcooking.blogspot.com

Despina is a cooking coach and writer. She has a happy habit of blogging recipes and food-related ideas at www.AlphaGoodCookCooking.blogspot.com. Her current passion is researching and testing recipes for her book, "Greek Heritage Cooking Simplified," dedicated to keeping alive her family's recipes for her nieces. Born in Greece, Despina grew up in Sydney, Australia. She lives with her husband, Dewey, in a small town by a lake in the South of the United States of America. Her three stepchildren can't wait for the book to be published so they can recreate their favorites of the Greek food that they grew up with. Her favorite recipes are her mother's Yemista (stuffed roasted vegetables) and her Aunt Polly's Roasted Lamb Shoulder with Fresh Artichokes and Potatoes.