



About Rhubarb

History

The Plant

Rhubarb originated in Western China and was prized for its medicinal qualities. It was used to cure many illnesses, but its main purpose was to induce vomiting.

Rhubarb is a member of the buckwheat family and is an early sign of spring. Although rhubarb is most used like a fruit, it is actually considered a vegetable. Rhubarb is free of fat, cholesterol, and sodium and is low in calories. It is also a good source of dietary fiber and vitamin C.

How to Buy

Choose flat stalks that are not curled or limp. Deep red stalks are sweeter and richer; tenderness is not related to size. Rhubarb is in season in West Virginia in early spring and late fall; it is most commonly harvested in early spring.

How to Prepare

Use only the stalks. Immediately cut off the rhubarb leaves and discard them. **Do not eat raw or cooked rhubarb leaves; they can be poisonous because they contain oxalate.**

Rhubarb goes well with strawberries, apples, and citrus fruit. It is usually paired with strawberries because of the wonderful flavor and the ease of use. Strawberries and rhubarb are in season around the same time.

Rhubarb is commonly boiled or stewed for use in sauces or as a dessert. Rhubarb also fares well in jams and jellies. Rhubarb preserves well by canning or freezing.

How to Store

For best quality, refrigerate rhubarb in a plastic bag and use within a few days.

To Freeze

Wash, trim, and cut rhubarb to desired length. Heat the rhubarb in boiling water for one minute and cool promptly in cold water (known as blanching). This stops enzyme actions, helping retain color and flavor and retard the loss of vitamins. After blanching, tightly pack into freezer bags or containers without adding sugar. Leave a bit of headspace. Use within 6 to 12 months for best quality. Hint: When using frozen rhubarb in a recipe that calls for fresh or frozen rhubarb, measure rhubarb while it is still frozen – do not thaw before measuring.

To Can

Trim off leaves, wash stalks, cut into ½- to 1-inch pieces and put in a large saucepan. Add ½ cup of sugar for each quart of rhubarb. Let stand until juice appears. Heat gently to boiling. Immediately pack rhubarb mixture into hot jars, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles, wipe jar rims, and adjust lids. Process pints or quarts in a boiling water bath for 15 minutes.

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