



Food Safety & Nutrition

First Fruits of the Summer



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The first of the summer fruit, rhubarb, is ready to harvest! Rhubarb which looks like pink celery sticks is botanically a vegetable. But we all use it as a fruit. Cool temperatures in the spring intensify the redness of the stalks. The leaves are heart-shaped, crinkly and very toxic. They contain large amounts of oxalic acid which is used to clean metals.

Yellow-green flowers sometimes grow up in the center of the plant. Usually, the flower stems are cut back as they take away the strength from the stalks. When the flowers are allowed to grow, they are deep-fried into a tasty side dish.

If you buy rhubarb at the farmers market or grocery store, select well colored, good sized, straight firm stalks. If the leaves are attached, they should look fresh and crisp; small leaves indicate younger, tender stalks. Don't buy stalks that are limp. If harvesting it yourself, pull the stalk from the plant gently rather than cutting it. This will help the plant produce more rhubarb yet this season.

Rhubarb is rich in vitamins, minerals and acids such as citric and oxalic acid. It is known to be blood-cleansing and purifying, but can reduce your calcium levels if you consume it everyday. Many people will peel the stalks to reduce the oxalic acid content.

Different colors of stalks will determine the taste. Green stalks with green flesh have the highest acid content and is particularly sour. It is mainly suitable for jams and jellies. Red stalks with green flesh are less sour and have a slight tangy taste. It is good for cake fillings or cookie fillings. Red stalks with red flesh have a sweeter flavor or a slight raspberry flavor. This variety is good in fruit salads, or fruit tarts or pies.

Rhubarb makes a great dessert when cooked. It will taste sweeter when cooked, so stew it first. Place the cut-up rhubarb in a saucepan (do not use aluminum or cast iron) with just enough water to barely cover it. Bring to a boil, and simmer gently until tender. After cooking, add sugar to suite your taste.

Freezing rhubarb is another option. This allows you to decide later what you may want to do with the rhubarb. Wash the rhubarb stems and cut them into 1/2 inch pieces. Pack the pieces into a freezer container. Freeze for up to one year.

Rhubarb is a versatile fruit that is hard to ruin. It can be mixed with other fruits, can be used in all kinds of desserts or as part of a meat marinade or sauce. If you haven't tried it before give it a try. You might like it!!!

Rhubarb Freezer Jam

Yield 3 pints

5 cups rhubarb, cut into fine pieces

4 cups sugar

6 oz. raspberry gelatin

Over medium heat cook the rhubarb with a small amount of water in the saucepan. Heat until stringy and soft, about 10-15 minutes. Add sugar and cook an additional 10 minutes exactly. Remove the saucepan from the heat and add the gelatin and stir. Carefully pour the mixture into jelly jars and cover with lids. Allow to cool completely and freeze until ready to use.

Rhubarb Chutney

Yield 4 pints

8 cups rhubarb, finely chopped

½ cup chopped onion

1 ½ cups chopped raisins

3 ½ cups brown sugar

½ cup vinegar

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp cinnamon

1 tsp ground ginger

1 tsp allspice

Cook first 5 ingredients until thick, about 25 minutes, stirring frequently. Add salt, cinnamon, ginger and allspice and cook 5 minutes longer. Pour boiling hot into hot sterilized jars leaving 1/8inch headspace. Process for 10 minutes in boiling water bath canner or refrigerate and consume within 4 weeks.

Rhubarb Ginger Jam

Yield 6 cups

2 lb. rhubarb (about 8 cups)

2 cups granulated sugar

1/3 cup fresh ginger, minced or grated

½ vanilla bean, split with seeds scraped into pan

Place all ingredients into a large saucepan. Bring to a simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally for 20-25 minutes on medium heat until the mixture reaches 218 to 220 degrees F. on an instant read thermometer. Skim any foam from the top and remove vanilla bean. Let sit for 5 minutes.

Jam can be stored in sterilized canning jars in the refrigerator for a few weeks, or process in a boiling water bath canner for 10 minutes.

Rhubarb Mustard Salsa (for grilled fish)

1 tsp olive oil
1/2 lb rhubarb
1+ T sugar
1 1/2 T Dijon mustard
1/2 small red onion, chopped
1/4 tsp lime juice
1 T chopped fresh parsley
1 tsp chopped fresh basil
salt, freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat oil in skillet over medium heat. add rhubarb and sugar, cook, stirring often, until rhubarb is soft, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in remaining ingredients.

Arugula Salad with Strawberry Rhubarb Vinaigrette

Dressing:

1 C chopped fresh rhubarb
1 1/4 C chopped fresh strawberries
3 large shallots, coarsely chopped
1 T sugar
1/3 C red wine vinegar

Simmer in small non-reactive saucepan until tender, about 10 minutes. Puree, strain into large bowl, and cool.

Whisk in: 3/4 C canola oil 1/4 teaspoon dijon mustard

Salad:

1 bunch arugula, 12 whole strawberries, 4 oz goat cheese
