

Rhubarb 101

Brought to you By: Froedtert Hospital Dietitians

A perennial plant that has celery like stalks that are greenish pink to dark red in color. Rhubarb is a vegetable but is generally prepared and served in the same manner as a fruit, since it is most often cooked and sweetened with sugar. When eaten raw, it has a tart flavor and when cooked, there is a tendency to add more sugar than necessary in an attempt to sweeten the flavor. The leaves of the rhubarb should not be consumed because they contain oxalic acid, which makes them toxic. There are two types of rhubarb available. Hot-house rhubarb has yellow leaves and pink to light red colored stalks that are milder in taste and not as stringy. Field-grown rhubarb has green leaves and deeper red stalks that have a more intense flavor.

Uses:

Rhubarb can be eaten raw with a little sugar sprinkled over it but it is generally cooked with other ingredients to produce a fruit dish of some type. Rhubarb can be used nicely to enhance the flavor of other fruits, such as pairing it with strawberries in baked sauces or beverages. It makes a delicious pie filling and is also used to make sauce in the same manner as applesauce. Rhubarb can also be used to make jellies, jams, cakes, muffins, and other desserts

How to Buy:

Rhubarb stalks vary from red to pink and they may also appear speckled or green. This color variation has little or no impact on the ripeness of the rhubarb. When selecting, choose stalks that are young, crisp and blemish free. Generally the redder and slimmer stalks are sweeter in taste, reducing the amount of sugar required to sweeten the tart taste of the rhubarb. Rhubarb is also available canned and frozen.

At Their Best:

Field-grown rhubarb's peak season is in April and May.

Storage:

Rhubarb stalks can be stored in the refrigerator for 3-5 days, unwashed and sealed in an air tight plastic bag. It is best to store fresh rhubarb in whole stalks because cut or diced pieces will dry out more quickly. Trim just before using. Rhubarb can be frozen for future use by cutting the stalks into 1-inch lengths and packaged in an airtight bag or by stewing first and the freezing. Rhubarb does not need to be sweetened before it is frozen.

Rhubarb Nutrition Info

One cup of diced rhubarb contains 25 calories and is fat and sodium free. It also contains potassium, manganese and vitamin C.

Rhubarb Preparation

Trim off leaf ends and roots. If stalks are wider than 1 inch, slice lengthwise in half or thirds. Be sure to discard the leaves and roots that contain toxic levels of oxalic acid. Peel any tough skin off before using.

1. If stems are too fibrous, pull off the strings.
2. Wash stalks and slice them into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch to 1-inch pieces. Pies and other recipes may call for the pieces to be cut to a smaller size.
3. Rhubarb can be eaten raw but most often is cooked. Place sliced rhubarb into a pot with a small amount of water. Cook over moderate heat for 20 minutes or until soft.

Rhubarb Cooking

Rhubarb can be eaten raw but because of its tartness, it is generally cooked and sweetened first. It can be sweetened with sugar, honey, syrup, or berry preserves.

Cooked Rhubarb

1. Combine 1 cup of sugar and 1 cup of water in a saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium heat and stir until sugar has dissolved.
2. Add 2 pounds of rhubarb, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch pieces.
3. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook uncovered until rhubarb is tender but not too soft, approximately 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Serve as a sauce.

Baked Rhubarb

1. Spread 2 pounds of rhubarb, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch pieces, on the bottom of a 9 x 13 inch pan.
2. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of ground ginger and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of nutmeg to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of sugar. Mix ginger and nutmeg into the sugar and then pour over the rhubarb.
3. Drizzle with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of orange or pineapple juice and cover with foil.
4. Bake for 30 minutes in a 350°F oven.
5. Stir mixture and bake uncovered for an additional 10 minutes or until rhubarb is tender.

Rhubarb Custard Bars

CRUST:

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/8 teaspoon salt
9 tablespoons chilled butter, cut into small pieces
Cooking spray

FILLING:

1/3 cup all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups sugar
1 1/2 cups 1% low-fat milk
3 large eggs
5 cups (1/2-inch) sliced fresh or frozen rhubarb (unthawed)

TOPPING:

1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup (4 ounces) block-style fat-free cream cheese
1/2 cup (4 ounces) block-style 1/3-less-fat cream cheese
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup frozen fat-free whipped topping, thawed

Preheat oven to 350°.

To prepare crust, lightly spoon 1 1/2 cups flour into dry measuring cups; level with a knife. Combine 1 1/2 cups flour, 1/2 cup sugar, and salt in a bowl. Cut in butter with a pastry blender or 2 knives until mixture resembles coarse meal. Press mixture into a 13 x 9-inch baking dish coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes or until crust is golden brown.

To prepare filling, lightly spoon 1/3 cup flour into a dry measuring cup; level with a knife. Combine 1/3 cup flour and 1 1/2 cups sugar in a large bowl; add milk and eggs, stirring with a whisk until well blended. Stir in rhubarb. Pour rhubarb mixture over crust. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes or until set. Cool to room temperature.

To prepare topping, place 1/2 cup sugar, cheeses, and vanilla in a bowl; beat with a mixer at medium speed until smooth. Gently fold in whipped topping; spread evenly over baked custard. Cover and chill at least 1 hour. Garnish with mint sprigs, if desired.

Yield: 36 servings (serving size: 1 bar)

NUTRITION PER SERVING

Calories 131; Fat 4.2g; Protein 2.5g; Cholesterol 29mg; Sodium 78mg; Carbohydrate 21g

Tip from www.hormel.com

Recipe from www.cookinglight.com