

Rhubarb Ravings!

Did you know that rhubarb is a vegetable? A tart vegetable, rhubarb, is often paired with sweet fruits making for a pleasing dessert. This means a heavenly dessert made with rhubarb and strawberries is a blend of fruit and vegetable. Since rhubarb takes on the flavor of the fruit or vegetable it is paired with, it is an excellent complement to many recipes.

Rhubarb has celery-like stalks that can be dark red, greenish pink, speckled, or solid green. Color has little to no effect on the ripeness of the rhubarb. This plant is known as a perennial, which means it will begin to sprout again in the Spring of every year. Since rhubarb is only around for a short while, enjoy it while you can!

When picking your rhubarb, look for stalks that appear fresh, crisp, and blemish-free. Full-grown stalks can be anywhere from 1 to 2 inches in diameter. The smaller stalks are commonly younger and are usually more tender. If the rhubarb stalks still have leaves, look for the stalks with smaller leaves. The stalks of rhubarb are great for your health, but keep the leaves out of your dishes, as they are toxic because they contain oxalic acid. Stalks that have split ends or are limp should be avoided. This usually means that the rhubarb is not fresh or has not been stored the correct way. When buying rhubarb, it is available fresh, frozen, and canned.

When buying or picking fresh rhubarb, it is helpful to know how to store it. You can refrigerate or freeze the rhubarb. Before freezing or refrigerating your rhubarb, the leaves should be removed and discarded from all stalks. To refrigerate your stalks, they must be placed in an airtight plastic bag or tightly wrapped in plastic. Make sure to wait to cut the stalks until right before cooking with them, or they will dry out faster. Refrigerated rhubarb can be stored for 5 to 7 days. To freeze rhubarb, the stalks can be left whole or cut into 1-inch thick pieces and placed in airtight bags. You can also stew, boil, or make a sauce with your rhubarb before placing it into airtight containers. Frozen rhubarb can be stored for up to 1 year. Frozen rhubarb is excellent when used in jams, jellies, sauces, and pies.

To prepare rhubarb, frozen rhubarb will need to be taken out to thaw, and fresh will need to have the leaves and roots removed, and the stalks washed. If the stalk is wider than one inch, you may want to cut it in half. The stalks may also have some blemishes, so you will want to trim these off before using the rhubarb. Some rhubarb may also need the strings pulled off because rhubarb is a very fibrous plant. On one end of the stalk, cut just under the skin, and pull this piece off to remove the strings. When stewing or making a sauce with the rhubarb, it should be cut into 3/4 to 1-inch pieces. Pies and other dessert recipes usually call for smaller-sized pieces, like 1/4 to 1/2-inch thick. Another thing to remember when cooking with rhubarb is that one pound of chopped equals approximately 3 cups uncooked and 2 cups cooked. When using frozen rhubarb, a 12-ounce bag is approximately 1 1/2 cups.

When eaten raw, rhubarb is a very tart plant, so it is commonly cooked and sweetened with sugar, honey, or syrup. Many people refer to it as the “pie plant” because it is very popularly used as a pie filling. It is also used for sauces, cakes, cookies, bars, crisps, muffins, crumbles, quick bread, and many other desserts. This delicious vegetable can be substituted in most recipes

that use cranberries! Rhubarb can be combined with berry preserves or sweet fruits like oranges, strawberries, and apples, so less sugar is needed in recipes.

Are you ready to be adventurous? Join the many others who celebrate Spring's rhubarb bounty.

(Sources: foodnetwork.com; www.rhubarb-central.com;))