

Vegetable of the Month

Rhubarb



Rhubarb is a relative of buckwheat and has an earthy, sour flavor. Rhubarb thrives in cold climates and originated in Western China, Tibet, Mongolia, Siberia and neighboring areas. The traditional role was medicinal-the dried root was a popular remedy for a wide range of illnesses. Its primary function was to induce vomiting, although rhubarb is also a mild astringent. This medicinal role caused the price of the dried root to rise. In 1542, rhubarb sold for ten times the price of cinnamon in France and in 1657 rhubarb sold for over twice the price of opium in England (Schneider, 2001). Beginning in the eighteenth century, rhubarb began to be consumed in foods, primarily drinks and meat stews.

Botanically speaking, rhubarb is considered a vegetable, but it's most often treated as a fruit — though it's rarely eaten raw. Just like fresh cranberries, rhubarb is almost unbearably tart on its own and needs the sweetness of sugar, honey, or fruit juice added to it to balance out the acidity. Rhubarb's nickname is the "pie plant" because that is the primary use for this vegetable.

Rhubarb was introduced to the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. Today most rhubarb is frozen for commercial and institutional use; only about a quarter of the crop is sold fresh.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size (61g)
Servings Per Container

Amount Per Serving

Calories 15 **Calories from Fat 0**

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 0g **0%**

Saturated Fat 0g **0%**

Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

Sodium 0mg **0%**

Total Carbohydrate 3g **1%**

Dietary Fiber 1g **4%**

Sugars 2g

Protein 1g

Vitamin A 2% • Vitamin C 8%

Calcium 6% • Iron 0%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:

Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Selection

Hothouse, or strawberry, rhubarb appears in markets as early as January and continues to be stocked through April. Field-grown, or cherry, rhubarb begins to arrive in markets in March and can continue to arrive through the summer (depending on the area where it is grown). Spring stalks are the juiciest and most-tender.

Fresh stalks are flat, not curled or limp. When stalks that have been pulled-not cut-from the field are available; choose them. Pulled stalks dry out less rapidly. Size is no indicator of tenderness. Deep red stalks are sweeter and richer.

Storage

Wrap rhubarb in plastic wrap and store it in the coldest part of the refrigerator for up to one week. Cooked and raw rhubarb both freeze well.

Preparation

Cut off and discard and leaves (see warning). Rinse and trim from base and tip. You may peel or cut with the skin intact. Remember to cook only in non-aluminum pots only due to the acidic nature of rhubarb.

WARNING

Never eat rhubarb leaves, cooked or raw. Eating the leaves can be poisonous because they contain oxalate. This toxin, plus another unknown toxin also found in the leaves, has been reported to cause poisoning when large quantities of raw or cooked leaves are ingested.

Varieties

Red stalk types: Crimson (may also be called Crimson Cherry, Crimson Red, or Crimson Wine). It produces brightly colored red stalks with the unique characteristic of being red throughout under normal temperature and moisture conditions of the Pacific Northwest.

Other vigorous red varieties are Valentine and Cherry Red (Cherry, Early Cherry), producing long, thick, deep-red stalks.



Speckled types (pink): Victoria produces large stalks of excellent quality, long, round with smooth ribs. It develops pink speckling on a light green stalk with the pink color being more intense at the bottom of the stalk, fading to a solid green near the top. Victoria is commonly used for forcing. Strawberry is very similar to Victoria, and may be the same variety.



MacDonald is another "pink" type that produces well.

German Wine is similar to Victoria but slightly more vigorous and more intense in color, typically with a darker pink speckling on a green stem.

Green varieties: Riverside Giant, a cold-hardy, vigorous producer with large diameter, long, green stalks.

Make Rhubarb Part of Your 5 A Day Plan



- Add rhubarb to your favorite pie or fruit bread.
- Add cooked rhubarb into a fruit topping for poultry.
- Top frozen yogurt with berries and rhubarb-adds a twist!

Recipes

Rhubarb and Berry Nut Muffins

Makes 6 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

Source: Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board

1 1/2 cups flour
1/3 cup applesauce
3/4 cup packed brown sugar
1 egg
1/2 cup buttermilk
1 cup blueberries, washed
1 cup blackberries, washed
1 cup rhubarb, diced
1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Topping:

1/4 cup packed brown sugar
1/2 cup chopped walnuts
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

In a large bowl, combine flour, brown sugar, baking soda and salt. Combine applesauce, egg, buttermilk and vanilla; stir into dry ingredients just until moistened. Fold in rhubarb and walnuts. Fill greased or paper-lined muffin cups two-thirds full. Combine topping ingredients; sprinkle over muffins. Bake at 375°F for 20-25 min. or until muffins test done. Cool 10 minutes before removing to rack.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 379, protein 7g, fat 8g, percent calories from fat 17%, cholesterol 32mg, carbohydrates 70g, fiber 4g, sodium 50mg

Rhubarb, Onion, and Raisin Chutney

Makes 6 servings

Each serving equals two 5 A Day servings

1 1/2 lbs onions, halved lengthwise and cut crosswise into 1/4-inch slices

3 Tbsp vegetable oil

1 cup golden raisins

3 Tbsp red-wine vinegar

1/8 tsp ground cloves

1/4 cup sugar

1 lb rhubarb, trimmed and cut into 1/2-inch pieces (about 3 cups)

In a large saucepan cook the onions in the oil over moderately low heat, stirring occasionally, until they are softened. While the onions are cooking, in a bowl combine the raisins, 1/2 cup hot water, the vinegar, the cloves, and the sugar, let the mixture stand for 15 minutes, and stir it into the onions. Bring the mixture to a boil, stirring, top it with the rhubarb (do not stir in the rhubarb), and cook the mixture, covered, at a slow boil for 5 minutes. Stir the mixture, cook it, uncovered, for 3 to 5 minutes more, or until the rhubarb is just tender, and season the chutney with salt and pepper. The chutney may be made 1 week in advance and kept in an airtight container and chilled. Serve the chutney warm or at room temperature.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 225, protein 3g, fat 7g, percent calories from fat 27%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrates 38g, fiber 4g, sodium 10mg



Baked Rhubarb with Raspberries

Makes 4 serving

Each serving equals two 5 A Day servings

1 1/3 cups raspberries (about 6 oz)

3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar

1/4 cup very hot water

2 Tbsp unsalted butter, cut into bits

1/4 tsp vanilla

1 pound rhubarb, trimmed and cut into
1/2-inch pieces (about 4 cups)

8 small scoops of low-fat frozen yogurt

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a blender purée the raspberries with the brown sugar and the water, strain the purée through a sieve into a bowl, pressing hard on the solids, and stir in the butter, the vanilla, and the rhubarb.

Transfer the mixture to an 11- by 7-inch baking dish and bake the dessert in the middle of the oven, for a total of 30 minutes, stir once very gently after 15 minutes. Cook until the rhubarb is soft. Let the dessert cool for 10 minutes and serve it over frozen low-fat yogurt.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 428, protein 9g, fat 8g, percent calories from fat 17%, cholesterol 24mg, carbohydrates 84g, fiber 5g, sodium 126mg

Balsamic Rhubarb Compote

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals two 5 A Day servings

3 Tbsp balsamic vinegar

2/3 cup sugar

3/4 tsp grated peeled fresh gingerroot

2 fresh rhubarb stalks, leaves discarded, ends trimmed, and stalks cut crosswise into 1/4-inch-thick slices, or 2 cups frozen sliced rhubarb, thawed, reserving liquid

In a saucepan simmer vinegar with sugar and gingerroot, stirring, until sugar is dissolved then stir in rhubarb (with reserved liquid if using frozen). If using fresh rhubarb, simmer until crisp-tender, about 1 minute, and transfer with a slotted spoon to a bowl. If using frozen, as soon as mixture returns to a simmer transfer rhubarb with slotted spoon to bowl. Simmer liquid until thickened slightly, about 5 minutes, and remove pan from heat. Stir in rhubarb. Serve compote warm or at room temperature.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 142, protein 1g, fat 0g, percent calories from fat 0%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrate 35g, fiber 1g, sodium 3mg