

SEASONAL INGREDIENT: RHUBARB

Susan Denzer, Chef and Culinary Consultant
Love + Craft Kitchen, LLC
www.loveandcraftkitchen.com

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KITCHEN



Photo: Love+Craft Kitchen

Rhubarb is one of those foods that elicits feelings of love or strong dislike! I have fond memory ingrained in my mind of picking tall rhubarb stalks from a garden tucked behind the garage of my childhood home, dipping the end in a small bowl of sugar and taking a large bite. I still enjoy that taste of sweet and sour, and the zing it provides, yet, I know others who feel otherwise!

With rhubarb season starting in many other areas across the US, fresh stalks are showing up at local farmers markets, and will be available through much of the summer. Frozen rhubarb is generally available in grocers year-round. Flavor profiles differ slightly by variety grown - some sweeter, some more pungent. Check with your local farmer for options grown in your area.

Most of us consider rhubarb a fruit, which is natural due to its tart, fruity flavor and generally how it is used, but technically it is a vegetable. Originating in Western and Central Asia, it was long used for its curative and detoxification qualities and later was commonly used in savory dishes.

Nutritionally, rhubarb is rich in vitamins K and C, minerals including folate, riboflavin, manganese, iron, potassium and others, and antioxidants which may prevent serious diseases.

Fun Facts

Imagine this....

- In the early 1400's, rhubarb root was in high demand due to its reputation as a medicinal product and was, therefore, much more expensive than other herbs or spices such as saffron and cinnamon. It was traded as a luxury good, just as silk, satin, diamonds and other gems.

(Frances Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia*, University of California Press, 2002)

- According to the History Channel, a new variety of rhubarb was sold as commemorative memorabilia for Queen Victoria's coronation - Victoria Rhubarb.

<https://www.history.com/news/rhubarb-a-love-affair>

SELECT and STORE

Rhubarb color is not an indication of sweetness. Many presume that red stalks are sweeter than green, yet it really depends on the variety. Also, different varieties may be more tender or stringy than others.

- Choose stalks that are firm, crisp and free of insect damage. Leaves should not be wilted.
- Remember that **the leaves are toxic and should NOT be eaten.**
- To store, remove and discard the leaves, then wash and pat dry stalks.
 - Place FRESH rhubarb stalks in a plastic bag and store in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator for up to 5 days.
 - To FREEZE rhubarb, cut into 1-inch pieces, then seal in an airtight bag and place in the freezer for up to one year.

NOTE: One pound of stalks provides approximately 3 cups chopped rhubarb.

USE

Although commonly thought of as a sweet dessert ingredient, rhubarb has been used in savory dishes for centuries. It pairs well not only with strawberries, but with apples, cherries and pears, warm spices such as cinnamon, nutmeg and cardamom, and orange, cream and honey.

Baking and stewing are common cooking methods used for rhubarb. It also works well in preserving due the high amount of acid it provides.

Try adding rhubarb to:

- sauces (sweet and savory)
- cake
- muffins
- pie, crisp, cobbler
- bars
- beverages
- jam and jelly
- ice cream, sorbet, granita
- smoothies
- souffle
- custard
- pancakes or crepes
- chicken, pork, beef, lamb and fish
- chutney
- salsa

For further information on rhubarb and its uses, check out [Rhubarb Central](#).

Interested in attending a Rhubarb Festival? Check out what is nearby - [2019 Rhubarb Festivals](#).

RECIPE

[CHICKEN WITH SAVORY RHUBARB SAUCE](#)

It may seem like an unusual pairing - chicken and rhubarb - yet rhubarb has been used in savory recipes for centuries. Here, it works splendidly.