



# RHUBARB

## Description

Rhubarb is botanically a vegetable, it is used as a fruit, sometimes even referred to as “pie plant” because of its frequent use as pie filling. Except for its pink color, rhubarb is similar in appearance to celery. The acidity and intensity of flavor vary, and young stalks are more tender than older stalks. The roots and leaves of rhubarb are not eaten because they contain significant amounts of oxalic acid and are highly poisonous.

## Varieties

Rhubarb is available in two main types, each of which includes many species and dozens of varieties. Hothouse-grown rhubarb has pink or light red stalks and yellow leaves, and field grown rhubarb has dark-red stalks and green leaves. The hothouse variety has a milder flavor and is less stringy. The field-grown variety grows to 3 feet and has red roots. The hothouse variety is grown throughout Washington, Oregon and Michigan.

## Nutrient Content

Rhubarb is packed with Vitamin C and fiber. It is also high in potassium. Rhubarb partners well with cherries, apples and most berries.

## Uses

Rhubarb, dubbed the “pie plant”, and the stalks, soft and delectable when baked, do make a divine pie filling. Rhubarb is too tart to eat raw. Instead, the stalks are sliced thinly or diced, baked or stewed, and then sweetened. Because rhubarb becomes slightly sweeter when cooked, sweeteners should be added after cooking. Cooked rhubarb may be sweetened with sugar, honey, maple syrup, orange or pineapple juice, or berry preserves. Combining rhubarb with sweet fruits such as strawberries decreases the amount of sweetener needed and hence the number of calories. Cooking causes rhubarb to turn brown, but this can be prevented by the addition of a cooked beet to the pot. Aluminum or cast iron saucepans should not be used to cook rhubarb because the acid in the vegetable will blacken the pot and the rhubarb.

## Availability

Rhubarb is available frozen, canned or fresh, sold as loose stalks or bagged. Most cooks prefer to use the fresh stalks. The leaves should be cut off before storing the stalks in a plastic bag. They will stay fresh in the refrigerator for about a week. The rhubarb season in the U.S. runs from April to September, although it can be grown forced, which accounts for its availability early in the year when other crops are scarce. Early forced rhubarb has a distinctive bright pink color and delicate flavor. Outdoor rhubarb is a little darker in color.

## Recipe

### Rhubarb Cherry Pie

- 3 cups sliced fresh or frozen rhubarb (1/2“ pieces)
- 1 can (16 ounces) pitted tart red cherries, drained
- 1- 1/4 cups sugar
- 1/4 cup quick cooking tapioca
- 4 to 5 drops red food coloring, optional
- Pastry for double crust pie (9 inches)

In a large bowl, combine the first five ingredients; let stand for 15 minutes. Line a 9-in. pie plate with pastry; add filling. Top with a lattice crust; flute the edges. Bake at 400 degrees for 40 to 50 minutes or until the crust is golden and filling is bubbling. Yield : 8 servings

## Origin

Much of the history of cultivation of rhubarb is related to its use as a medicinal plant. The earliest recorded use of rhubarb for medical purposes appeared in 2700 B.C. Marco Polo was the first to introduce rhubarb to Europe. Although rhubarb stalks were eaten in eastern Turkey as early as the 13th century, it was not until the 18th century that Europeans began to use rhubarb as a food. By 1830. rhubarb had become a popular winter vegetable in the London markets. In the late 18th or early 19th century, seeds and rootstock of rhubarb were brought to New England, where it was cultivated and began to appear in Massachusetts produce markets by the 1820's.