

Piiiiieplant, Baby!



Rhubarb and Pieplant are common names for *Rheum rhabarbarum* L. It is a member of the buckwheat family and has large, thick, succulent petioles (stalks) that are used as food. Rhubarb grows wild in central Asia. It was cultivated over 2,000 years ago for its medicinal properties (the dried root is a strong purgative). Rhubarb was introduced into Britain in the sixteenth century and became a food crop in North America in the eighteenth century. Rhubarb's unique taste makes it a favorite ingredient in pies and desserts. It is low in calories but a good source of vitamins A and C, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, potassium, phosphorous, and high quality dietary fiber. It is currently cultivated in much of Europe and the United States. Fresh rhubarb is available from early winter through early summer.

Ok, so now you know a little more than you ever wanted to know about rhubarb, but you are still wondering what in the world you are supposed to do with it, right?

I wasn't going to give a recipe for pie filling as that is just too obvious. But, it's not nicknamed Pieplant for nothin', baby!

Rhubarb makes great pies. I like it straight up, but most people like it mixed with strawberries. Rhubarb and strawberries are natural partners. They taste wonderful together and they are both in season at the same time. Rhubarb and blueberries (Blubarb) also make a great combo. Oh, and apples! Whatev...rhubarb combines well with lots of different fruit.



Rhubarb Strawberry Pie Filling

3 large apples, peeled, cored, and chopped fine
1 tablespoon freshly grated orange zest (rind)
1/4 cup freshly squeezed orange juice*
7 cups 1 inch slices rhubarb
2 cups granulated sugar
4 cups hulled, halved strawberries

- 1). Prepare jars and lids. Prepare lids according to manufacturer's directions.
- 2). In a large stainless steel pot, pour the apples, orange zest, and orange juice. Stir to coat apples thoroughly. Stir in rhubarb and sugar. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and boil gently, stirring frequently, until rhubarb is tender, about 12 minutes. Add strawberries and return to a boil. Remove from heat.
- 3). Ladle the hot pie filling into hot pint jars, leaving 1 inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace, if necessary, by adding my hot filling. Wipe rims. Center lid on jar. Screw band down until resistance is met, then increase to finger-tip tight.
- 4). Place jars in canner, ensuring they are completely covered with at least 1" of water. Bring to a boil and process for 15 minutes. Remove canner lid. Wait 5 minutes, then remove jars, cool, clean jars, label with product name and date, and store in a cool dark place.

Source: Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving

Besides pie and cobbler, my mom used to just make a sweetened stew and we would eat it by the bowl full. Sometimes ala mode.

Once you are full of fresh rhubarb pie, cobbler, stew and jam try this recipe for a refreshing juice concentrate. You can also freeze it in ice cube trays and serve it in Ginger Ale on a hot summer day.

Sunshine Rhubarb Juice Concentrate

(Yield: About 4 pint jars)

12 cups sliced rhubarb
4 cups water
Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
Grated zest and juice of 1 orange
1½ cups sugar

1. In a large stainless steel saucepan, combine rhubarb and water, lemon zest, and orange zest. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat, cover and boil gently until rhubarb is soft, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and add lemon juice and orange juice.
2. Transfer to a dampened jelly bag or strainer lined with several layers of cheese cloth set over a deep bowl. Let drip for at least 2 hours.
3. Combine rhubarb juice and sugar and bring back to 190 degrees over heat to dissolve sugar.
4. Prepare hot water bath canner and lids.
5. Process pints for 10 minutes. Then allow them to cool for 5 minutes before pulling them out of the canner.

Source: Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving



Photo courtesy of todaysagreatdayto.com

Read more about growing rhubarb here: <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8020.pdf> and how to use rhubarb here <https://www.uaf.edu/files/ces/publications-db/catalog/hec/FNH-00064.pdf>