

Rhubarb

Growing & Harvesting

Grow. Technically a vegetable, rhubarb or “pie plant” can produce for 20 or more years and grows to a size of two feet high and six feet wide. To allow enough space for the mature plant, dig a hole two feet around and at least one foot deep. Add compost and plant crowns three feet apart at a depth of 2-3 inches below the soil surface. Water and cover with a layer of mulch. For more growing information, look for the MontGuide, *Growing Rhubarb in Montana* at www.msueextension.org or call your Extension office.

Harvest. A mature rhubarb plant can produce up to six pounds of stalks in a season. For the first two years after planting, harvest stalks sparingly, taking only a few at a time and only for a few weeks throughout the season. In the third growing season, harvest as much as you like from spring through the first part of July or until stalks begin to become smaller in diameter.

Selection

Rhubarb can be red, partially-red or green. The deeper the red, the more flavorful the stalks. Medium-size stalks are generally more tender than large ones, which may be stringy. Choose firm stalks which are not shriveled or limp. Only the stems are edible. Leaves should be discarded because they are poisonous. The stalks do not need to be completely blemish-free. Damaged spots can be trimmed away.

Storage

For storage, first trim and discard leaves. Freshly harvested stalks can be kept in the refrigerator, unwashed and wrapped tightly in plastic for up to three weeks. Refresh rhubarb stalks by standing them in a pitcher that has been filled partially with cold water. Allow them to stand for a minimum of one hour.

Nutrition Information

Most fruits are rich in fiber and phytochemicals, but provide negligible amounts of saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, and sodium and are gluten-free. Rhubarb has only 13 calories per half-cup serving and is rich in Vitamin C.

Uses

Bake. Use in recipes for jams, jellies, desserts, quick breads, juice and pies.

Sauce. Rinse and cut the stalks into 1-2 inch pieces and add 3/4-cup of water per four cups of rhubarb. Bring to a boil and simmer until tender. Since rhubarb is acidic, use a pan that will not cause color change or chemical leakage from cookware. These pans are called “non-reactive pans” and include aluminum, stainless steel, Teflon coated aluminum, or enamel-coated cast iron. Pans causing reactions to highly acidic foods such as rhubarb, are iron, steel, and aluminum. Rhubarb sauce is excellent as a topping for ice cream, pancakes, waffles, pound cake, a bowl of fresh fruit, gingerbread or yogurt. Add sugar if desired. Sauce will keep in the refrigerator up to four days.

Preserve. For more information on preserving rhubarb, look for MontGuides: *Freezing Fruits*; *Drying Fruit*; *Processing Fruit*, *Tomatoes and Mixtures in a Pressure Canner*; and *Making Jams, Jellies and Syrups*. Visit www.msueextension.org/nutrition and click on the food preservation link or contact your Extension office.



Food Safety Tips

1. **Clean.** Wash hands and food contact surfaces before and after preparation.
2. **Chill.** Keep produce and food cool and chill promptly.
3. **Separate.** Keep produce and food separate from raw meats and eggs.
4. **Cook.** Cook food to a safe temperature.

Questions? Click on www.foodsafety.gov

Preparation: Step-by-Step



Wash hands. Thoroughly rinse stalks to remove any dirt or sand.



Cut off leaves and end of stem using a knife. Remove blemishes with a paring knife.



For stalks wider than one inch, slice stem in half. For fibrous stalks, remove strings by cutting just under the skin and pulling the string down the stalk. Continue until all strings are removed.



Cut stalks into 3/4- to 1-inch pieces for use in stews or sauces. For use in pies, use 1/4- to 1/2-inch pieces.

For More Information:

Montana State University Extension: www.msueextension.org
MSU Extension Master Gardener: www.mtmastergardener.org
MSU Extension Food and Nutrition: www.msueextension.org/nutrition
MSU Extension Nutrition Education Programs: www.buysatlivebetter.org

Information Courtesy of:

Fruits & Veggies More Matters. (2012). Rhubarb: Nutrition. selection. storage. <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/rhubarb>
University of Illinois Extension. (2013). Rhubarb. *Watch Your Garden Grow*. <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/rhubarb.cfm>

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