

Preserving Rhubarb



Rhubarb Fast Facts

- Commonly available rhubarb is red, but pink and green varieties also exist. Red rhubarb is pink when young or when grown in greenhouses out of season.
- Rhubarb is a vegetable stalk that is usually prepared as a fruit pie or sauce. It is sold with a portion of the leaf attached to keep it fresh. Trim the leaves before preparing.
- Rhubarb leaves contain high levels of oxalic acids. Eating large amounts of oxalic acids can cause swelling of the tongue and throat that leads to severe breathing problems.
- Preserve rhubarb stalks or slices by canning, freezing, drying, or pickling, as well as by making jam or sauce.
- One pound of rhubarb is equivalent to 8 medium stalks, 2 cups sliced or chopped, or 1 cup cooked purée.
- **To prepare rhubarb:** Cut off and discard any leafy portions. Wash the stalks. Cut into desired lengths or slices. When preparing rhubarb, use non-reactive vessels such as stainless steel and glass. Metals such as aluminum, iron, and copper will turn rhubarb an unappetizing brown color.

Canned rhubarb: Use 1¾ pound rhubarb (about 12 to 14 stalks) per quart. Toss with ½ cup sugar and let stand 3 to 4 hours in a cool place. Heat over medium for 5 minutes, or until sugar dissolves and mixture boils. Boil for 30 seconds. Pack while hot into jars; use boiling water to adjust headspace to ½-inch. Instead of sugar, you may boil rhubarb in unsweetened apple, pineapple, or white grape juice. Process pints or quarts of rhubarb for 15 minutes (at 0 to 1,000 feet).

Pickled Rhubarb: Prepare rhubarb spears or thick, 1-inch slices. Prepare a pickling syrup: per quart of rhubarb, heat 1 cup sugar, ½ cup water, 2 to 8 tablespoons vinegar, 12 slices fresh ginger, 1 teaspoon whole cloves, and ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper in a covered saucepan and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes; strain to remove solids. Pour hot syrup over prepared rhubarb in a sterilized jar and refrigerate. The flavor improves after several days. Use within 1 month. For longer storage, boil pickled rhubarb for 30 seconds, and pack while hot into jars to ½-inch headspace. Process pints or quarts of pickled rhubarb for 15 minutes (at 0 to 1,000 feet).

Strawberry-Rhubarb Sauce for Yogurt: In a large saucepan, add 3 cups hulled and sliced strawberries, 2 sliced rhubarb stalks, 1 tablespoon sugar, 1 tablespoon orange juice, and grated zest from half an orange. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer 5 to 8 minutes, or until rhubarb is tender. Refrigerate and use within one month. For longer storage, after cooking sauce, reduce

heat to prevent sticking, but keep hot while filling jars to ½-inch headspace. Process half-pints or pints of sauce for 15 minutes (at 0 to 1,000 feet).

Rhubarb Marmalade: In a large heavy stainless-steel or enamel pot, combine 1¾ pound thinly sliced rhubarb (about 12 to 14 stalks), 1 each small thinly sliced orange and lemon (seeds discarded), and 3 cups sugar. Let mixture stand for 30 minutes. Add 1½ teaspoons red wine or grape juice (optional for color and flavor). Bring to a boil over medium heat, reduce to a gentle boil for 1 hour, or until marmalade is thick. Refrigerate and use within one month. For longer storage, after cooking marmalade, reduce heat to prevent sticking, but keep hot while filling jars to ¼-inch headspace. Process half-pints or pints of marmalade for 15 minutes (at 0 to 1,000 feet).

Dried strawberry-rhubarb fruit leather: Fruit leathers are made from purées that are spread thin and dried until supple and chewy. Combine rhubarb with another fruit for optimal results. Prepare strawberry rhubarb sauce as above. Preheat an oven or food dehydrator to 130°F to 140°F. Line the drying tray with plastic wrap or parchment paper. Spread sauce ¼ to ½ inch thick on the liner. Dry until leather is evenly pliable and firm; there should be no soft spots. Peel from liner while still warm and cut or roll into serving pieces. Cool until no longer warm and then wrap pieces individually. Store in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for about 2 months. Freeze for longer storage.