

All About Green Rhubarb



Green rhubarb facts

Rhubarb flavor depends on variety, not whether the rhubarb stalks (or petioles) are green, pink, red, or speckled with two colors. Red rhubarb varieties can be pink or green early in the growing season, or when grown indoors in a hothouse. Connoisseurs of rhubarb believe that pink and green rhubarb is often sweeter and has more robust flavor than red varieties.

Green rhubarb is often sweet with medium tartness and robust rhubarb flavor. Green rhubarb may have pink speckling on the lower portion of the stalk, turning green near the leaf.

Remember that all varieties of rhubarb leaves are rich in oxalic acids. Eating large amounts of oxalic acids can cause swelling of the tongue and throat that leads to severe breathing problems.

Pickled rhubarb: Cut green or red rhubarb (or a mixture) into spears or 1-inch slices and place in a quart jar. In a saucepan, place 1 cup sugar, ½ cup water, and 2 to 8 tablespoons vinegar (for sweet to tart flavor) slices fresh ginger, 1 teaspoon whole cloves, and ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper. Cover saucepan and simmer syrup 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, this recipe for pickled rhubarb may be canned. Add prepared rhubarb to strained syrup in a saucepan, boil for 30 seconds, and pack while hot into sterilized jars to 1/2 -inch headspace. Process pints or quarts of pickled rhubarb for 15 minutes (at 0 to 1,000 feet).

Rhubarb barbecue sauce: Makes about 1 quart. In a large, heavy, non-reactive (stainless or enamel) saucepan, combine 5 cups chopped fresh or frozen green (or red) rhubarb, 1 cup chopped tomatillo or green (or red) tomato, 1 cup chopped onion, ½ to 2 cups apple cider vinegar (for sweet to tangy sauce), 1 cup brown sugar or 1/2 cup honey, 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce, 1 teaspoon dry mustard, 1 teaspoon mild or hot chile powder or cayenne, 1 tablespoon salt, ½ teaspoon ground black pepper, and ½ teaspoon liquid smoke. Bring ingredients to a boil over high heat, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover, and cook 30 minutes, or until vegetables are very soft. Using a hand blender, or working in small batches in a food processor or blender, purée sauce until smooth. Return barbecue sauce to pan and simmer another 45 minutes. A thin, homemade barbecue sauce will naturally separate, so uncover during the last 45 minutes of cooking if you want a thicker sauce

that doesn't separate. If sauce does separate, simply stir to recombine before heating and serving. Green rhubarb barbecue sauce is especially good on salmon, but also works well with grilled or roasted pork, lamb, and chicken.

Rhubarb apple pie: Makes one 9-inch pie. Prepare a two-crust pie pastry. Preheat oven to 450°F. In a large bowl, toss together until evenly coated: 4 cups sliced (about 2 pounds) green rhubarb, 1 cup (about 1 medium) sliced sweet (not tart) apple, 1 cup granulated sugar, 2 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca granules (or 1/4 cup all-purpose flour), and 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon. Spoon mixture into a pastry-lined pie plate. Dot with 1 tablespoon diced cold butter. Top pie with remaining pastry; trimmed and crimped. Bake in the preheated oven for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°F. Continue to bake another 40-45 minutes, or until pastry is browned and filling is bubbling. Cool completely before slicing and serving.

Rhubarb soda or iced tea: Syrup recipe makes about 2 cups. Place 1 pound washed and coarsely chopped fresh or frozen green rhubarb in a saucepan with 1½ cups water, or enough to barely cover the vegetable. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce to a simmer, and cook 10 minutes. Strain through a fine-meshed sieve or cheesecloth; let drain 30 minutes. Press the solids gently to remove as much of the liquid as possible, excessive pressing creates cloudy syrup. Discard the solids (or use to make sauce or liqueur). Add 1 cup sugar or ½ cup honey (or to taste) and stir until blended. Store syrup in a glass bottle or jar in the refrigerator about 1 month. Pour 2 ounces of fruit syrup over ice in a tall glass, top with club soda or iced tea, and stir to blend. Garnish with a sprig of mint.