

Eating Local and Seasonal: Rhubarb

By Lisa Lau, Registered Dietitian at the Georgina Nurse Practitioner Led Clinic

Rhubarb season is here and pick-your-own farms are finally opening up for rhubarb picking this month! Rhubarb season always seems too short, but in this issue, you will find out that rhubarb can actually be available for half of our entire year. Read on to learn more and check out a new way to use rhubarb with the recipe on the back!



Winter Vs. Spring Crop

Rhubarb is widely found in grocery stores in spring and through the summer. This spring crop is characterized by its dark green leaves and bright red stalks, and well known as a dessert favourite.

Now you might have noticed rhubarb in some stores in as early as January or February. If you did, you were looking at what's called forced winter rhubarb. This winter crop has smaller leaves, and a lighter colour compared to the spring crop. Forced rhubarb is grown by digging up outdoor rhubarb roots in the fall and moving them to an indoor home through the winter. The barn or shed where the rhubarb is grown is kept dark and heated to about 10 degrees to allow the crop to grow starting in December. Not many farmers grow forced winter rhubarb because of the expensive energy costs (there are exactly two forced rhubarb growers in Ontario) and so the winter crops are harder to find. If you do find it, it is worth a try because of its milder taste and call for less sugar in its recipes.

Nutritional Goodness

Rhubarb is a vegetable that is rich in vitamins C and K. It also contains fibre, potassium and smaller amounts of other vitamins and minerals.

The leaves of the rhubarb plant contains oxalic acid and should not be consumed. Oxalic acid can cause irritation in the mouth and discomfort in the digestive tract. In serious cases, oxalic acid can be poisonous and fatal.

Using Rhubarb



1. Buy stalks that are crisp and firm. Trim off all the leaves and wash before using.



2. For wider stalks, slice lengthwise to separate into two or three stalks.



3. For more fibrous stalks, cut just under the skin and peel away the top layer.



4. Cut the stalk into shorter pieces of the desired length for your recipe.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

June 2016

Rhubarb Vinaigrette

Rhubarb season for many people means pie-baking or jam-making season. If you love rhubarb and need one more way to satisfy your rhubarb craving, here is a homemade rhubarb vinaigrette that will give an extra kick to all your summer salads.



Makes 3 servings (1 serving = 2 tbsp.)

Ingredients:

1 stalk	Rhubarb, thinly sliced
1 tbsp.	Honey
2 tbsp.	Red wine vinegar
2 tbsp.	Olive oil

Directions:

1. In a small saucepan, simmer the rhubarb with $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water for several minutes, or until the rhubarb becomes very soft. Set aside to cool.
2. Once rhubarb has cooled, place all the ingredients except olive oil into a blender. Begin blending the ingredients together, while gradually adding in the olive oil. Blend the ingredients until a smooth consistency is achieved.
3. Add to your favourite summer salad!

Tip: Forced rhubarb has the tartness and flavour of the outdoor varieties, but on a much milder note. You may need to reduce the amount of sugar used in traditional rhubarb recipes to complement this flavour. For a lower-fat alternative, you can reduce the amount of olive oil by half (but note that the dressing may have thicker consistency).

Nutrition information (Per 2 tbsp):

110 calories, Fat 9 g (14% DV), Carbohydrate 8 g (3% DV), Fibre 1 g (4%), Protein 0 g, Sodium 0 mg (0% DV), Sugars 6 g, Vitamin C 3 mg (6%)

Recipe adapted from <http://www.dinnerwithjulie.com/recipe/rhubarb-vinaigrette>