

RECIPE for health

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In partnership with Health4U and Culinary Services

Featured Food:

RHUBARB



By Peggy Crum, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

Like many northerners, rhubarb does not thrive down south. Michigan is the growing ground for some of the finest rhubarb in North America. The red and green stalks are ready to make their annual appearance as the earliest spring fruit, or I should say, vegetable. Although rhubarb is actually a large perennial herb, it serves as a stand-in for fruit in pies and sauces.

It's not "just an old wives' tale" that rhubarb leaves are poisonous. The leafy greens of the rhubarb plant are so high in oxalate (oxalic acid) that they are toxic (and when eaten can cause sore mouth and throat and other gastrointestinal symptoms).

For most people, the petioles (stems or stalks) are safe to eat since they have a lower concentration of oxalate. Still, the stems contain enough oxalic acid to cause rhubarb's super sour taste. To tame the tartness, it helps to soak the stalks in cold water for 20 minutes before chopping and cooking them.

For the best flavor and juiciness, choose stalks that are firm and crisp with deeply colored glossy skin. Look for medium-sized stalks, about the size of a regular celery stalk. Pass on very thin or very thick stems as they may be tough or stringy. If you choose your stalks carefully, peeling is not necessary. Besides, peeling removes rhubarb's lovely red color! Just trim away any traces of leaves and chop to the size called for in the recipe. (One pound of rhubarb will yield four cups of chopped pieces, which will cook down to about two cups).

Cooking rhubarb is necessary, but cooking tends to fade its color, especially if it's overcooked. Simmering the rhubarb chunks in orange juice instead of water helps to preserve its natural rosy hue. To brighten the color, some recipes call for adding a few drops of red food dye to the sugar.

Just remember that with proper handling and preparation, the subtle, earthy flavor of rhubarb will surpass its sour nature.

Michigan Rhubarb Cherry Chutney Sauce

Recipe developed by Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski and featured in Residential Dining Services. Serves 10.

- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup tawny port
- 1 Tablespoon minced peeled fresh ginger
- 1 Tablespoon ground garlic
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ¼ teaspoon dried crushed red pepper
- ½ cup dried Michigan cherries
- 1 Tablespoon canola oil
- ¼ cup small diced shallots
- 4 cup 1/2-inch cubes fresh Michigan rhubarb
- 1 ½ cup chicken stock
- 1 Tablespoon clear gel or corn starch
- 2 Tablespoons orange juice
- Salt and pepper to taste

(Note: the tawny port is a style of port, a little sweeter than normal ruby port and also has a bit of a caramel type taste to it).

Combine first 10 ingredients in sauce pot, bring to simmer over medium heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Cover the pot and remove from heat and let rest for 15 minutes.

In sauté pan over medium heat warm the oil and then sauté shallots for 2 minutes. Add rhubarb and sauté for an additional 5 minutes.

Add the cherry port mixture to the sauté pan and let simmer for 1 minute.

(Add chicken stock and reduce by one-third over medium heat. Should take about 7–10 minutes).

Whisk corn starch/clear gel into the orange juice and then whisk slurry into sauce and bring sauce back to a boil then reduce heat.

Taste sauce and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper as needed.

(**Great sauce with pork, chicken, or duck)

This recipe will be served for lunch at The Gallery at Snyder/Phillips and Riverwalk Market at Owen Hall on May 20.

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