

Live Free and Dig with the Littleton Garden Club

In praise of rhubarb

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LITTLETON GARDEN CLUB

I love rhubarb! In recipes it is versatile, it is easy to grow, and therefore inexpensive. It is 94% water and a rich source of Vitamin K.

It seems that the Chinese used rhubarb for medicinal purposes as long as 1,800 years ago. It reached Europe in the 14th century. Then, the humble rhubarb was expensive, several times the price of other valuable herbs and spices such as saffron and cinnamon. By the 1700s it was planted extensively in England and Scotland. It arrived in the USA in the early 1800s.

Gardening/know-how.com has excellent advice on how to grow rhubarb. You can buy the root, which is called

a crown, at a garden center, or ask a neighbor who could divide one of theirs. They require a space of about 2 feet between each plant, also, in times of drought they may need to be watered. It is important to remove the flower stalks as soon as they appear, as they will otherwise rob the plant of nutrients. [But the flowers are remarkable if you let them bloom!] If you have new plants, wait until their second year to pick the stalks.

Cooking with rhubarb

It is a gift to cooks. As well as being cheap and easy to harvest, it is available early in the season, before most other fruits and vegetables are ready. And of course, strawberries are available at the same

time, so that rhubarb and strawberry pie is a perennial favorite. A search will offer recipes for jams, sauces, cakes, pies and a multitude of other desserts. It can even contribute to savory dishes, adding a sweet /tart flavor to a chicken dish.

Here are two easy recipes for beginners.

Rhubarb Liqueur

Rhubarb yielding about 1 1/4 lbs once the leaves and the white base of the stalks are removed.

1 1/2 c sugar

1 liter of vodka. There is no need to buy an expensive brand.

Chop the rhubarb into 1 inch pieces and put in a wide-mouthed jar with a good seal.

Add the sugar and shake well. Add the vodka and put the lid on the

jar.

Put in a cool, dark place for 3 to 4 weeks and for up to 6 months.

Shake the jar occasionally. Strain and bottle.

Rhubarb Syrup (great with many beverages)

Susan Retz

1/2 lb rhubarb = about 4 stalks, washed and cut into 1" pieces.

1 cup of granulated sugar

1 cup water

Combine and cook for 5-10 minutes, strain and save the syrup into a storage container and a pinch of salt.

Save the remaining rhubarb and eat it on toast for breakfast, like jelly.

For more information about the club and our meetings, please visit www.littletonnhgardenclub.org.