

Preserving Rhubarb

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Rhubarb is the vegetable that is enjoyed as a fruit. By itself, it provides a unique tart flavor, but combined with other foods to create sauces, pies, cakes, cobblers and jams provides us with delicious flavor combinations.



Selecting

Although fresh rhubarb is at its peak through May and June, harvesting can continue through the summer if plants have adequate water and don't wilt from the intense heat of July and August. The quality is best if it can be pulled from the garden and used before stems have a chance to dry. Choose rhubarb stems that are bright pink, crisp, and free of disease or insect damage. Pull the stems from ground level instead of cutting them. At any given time, harvest less than one-third of the stalks from any one plant.

Do not eat rhubarb leaves, as they are poisonous.

Canning

Rhubarb can be canned or used in making jams and jellies. The National Center for Home Food Preservation has recipes for [stewed rhubarb](#) and [rhubarb-strawberry jelly](#).

It is not safe to add any type of thickening to rhubarb before canning because the starch will interfere with the transfer of heat to the center of the jar during processing.

If you desire a thicker rhubarb sauce, add a little cornstarch, tapioca, or modified starch after you open the jar prior to serving.

Freezing

Rhubarb freezes well. Rhubarb can be packed into containers or freezer bags raw or pre-heated. Raw rhubarb gives a good quality frozen product without added sugar. According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, heating rhubarb in boiling water one minute and cooling promptly in cold water helps retain color and flavor. (Cut stalks in lengths to fit freezer container or bag before heating.) Watch the time closely as overcooking will cause it to lose its shape.

A dry pack simply involves putting either raw or blanched rhubarb into containers without sugar leaving ½ inch head space. Tray packs also work well with raw rhubarb. Spread a single layer of cut rhubarb on trays, freeze until firm (1 to 2 hours), then put in air tight bags or containers.

Rhubarb may also be frozen with sugar or syrup.

Check out this video on How to Freeze Rhubarb to see both Dry Pack and Tray Pack methods:
<https://extension.umaine.edu/food-health/food-preservation/how-to-videos/how-to-freeze-rhubarb/>

- For a sugar pack, mix 1 part sugar and 4 parts rhubarb and allow to stand until sugar is dissolved before packing into freezer containers.
- A syrup pack involves covering the rhubarb with syrup made by combining 1 cup sugar with 2 cups water and allowing adequate head space for expansion--½ inch for pints and 1 inch for quarts in wide top containers.
- In general, up to one-fourth of the sugar may be replaced with corn syrup or mild flavored honey.
- When cooking with rhubarb that is frozen in syrup, remember to include the sugar as part of the recipe.

Freezing already cooked rhubarb dishes saves time when serving. Plain sweetened sauces or those thickened with tapioca or ThermFlo® freeze well. Breads, cakes, cobblers, and some pies freeze well, but don't freeze rhubarb custard pies.

Source: <https://extension.psu.edu/preserving-rhubarb>, 5-8-2020.

Provided by Diane Whitten, Nutrition Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension. More food preservation resources can be found at <http://ccesaratoga.org/nutrition-food/food-preservation>