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Eat, Learn, Sell – Eating by Example - 03.06.15

Rhubarb

Origin: Washington

Pack: 15 lbs.

Rhubarb (*Rheum rhabarbarum* L.) is a cool season, perennial vegetable, grown for its leafstalks that have a unique tangy taste, generally used for pies and sauces. Rhubarb was first cultivated in the Far East more than 2,000 years ago. It was initially grown for medicinal purposes, and not until the 18th century was it grown for culinary use in Britain and America.

Although the leaves are toxic, various parts of the plants are purported to have medicinal and culinary uses. In the kitchen, fresh raw stalks are crisp (similar to celery) with a strong tart taste. Most commonly the plant's stalks are cooked with sugar and used in pies and other desserts. It pairs well with strawberries for an exquisite combination of sweet and tart. It is also delicious stewed. Good source of calcium and potassium.

There are two primary varieties of rhubarb: Hothouse and field grown. The hothouse variety is generally a little lighter in color and less 'stringy'. Hothouse rhubarb, which is cultivated in California, Oregon, Washington and Michigan is harvested from January through June. Field grown usually hits the market from April through June or July.

Identification note: Rhubarb is usually considered to be a vegetable; however, in 1947 a court in New York, NY decided that since it was used in the United States as a fruit, it was to be counted as a fruit for the purposes of regulations and duties.

Culinary Note: **Never eat the leaves, raw or cooked, as they contain toxins.** Cut the leaves off and discard as soon as preparation begins. Rinse the stalks and trim off the tops and bottoms of each piece. With the more mature stalks – or field grown rhubarb, remove the outer skin by peeling from the base of each stalk.

Storage: Fresh rhubarb can be stored for two to four weeks at 32-36 degrees F and 95% relative humidity. Store in perforated polyethylene bags.

