

# Home Cooking Chronicles: Rhubarb pie

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

As a baker, I love brown food. “Caramelization is flavor” and “no soggy bottoms allowed” are two of my baking mantras. As much as a good, strong bake excites me, spring has sprung and it’s a pleasure to start introducing a bit of color into our kitchens.

I’m an instructor at The Pantry, a cooking school in Seattle. One of my colleagues, Becky Selengut, teaches a class called “Misunderstood Vegetables.” She is a culinary decoder for underappreciated vegetables.

My colorful spring baking favorite, rhubarb, is technically a vegetable but is considered a fruit because it’s most often cooked as one. It is also misunderstood.

Rhubarb conjures a grandmotherly vibe for some people. To them, I say thank you — there is no higher compliment than saying something I make reminds you of your grandmother.

I have two rhubarb rules: the stalks are cooked and the leaves are not eaten (they’re poisonous). Although folks assume they are codependent, rhubarb

shines nicely without strawberries. Rhubarb’s sharpness sings when paired with citrus or sugar.

Rhubarb works in both savory and sweet dishes when a hint of pink and touch of zing is appreciated. The only exception to this is when my friend put rhubarb in a barbecue sauce, where it does not belong. The Southerner in me was appalled.

Let’s celebrate spring and celebrate the mystery of rhubarb, one of the earliest gifts from the garden.

## Rhubarb Ginger Buckle (Adapted from Julie Richardson; yields eight to 10 servings)

Rhubarb meets an old-fashioned (but alluringly delicious) cake. A buckle is a single layer cake with berries or fruit mixed in the batter, which gives it a “buckled” or indented appearance.

### Ginger crumb topping ingredients

- 4 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons light brown sugar
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup finely chopped candied ginger
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted



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Rhubarb ginger buckle features in-season rhubarb and ginger.

### Cake ingredients

- 1 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon dried ginger
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon lemon zest
- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup buttermilk, at room temperature
- 1 pound rhubarb, thinly sliced

### Preparation

Heat an oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Butter a 9-inch round baking pan that is 2 inches tall. Line the bottom with parchment.

Make the ginger crumb topping. Mix granulated sugar, brown sugar, flour and candied ginger together in a bowl. Stir in melted butter until well combined. Break the mixture up into “gravel” pieces and put in the freezer while you make the cake.

For the cake, whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, ginger and salt in a bowl.

Set aside. Using a stand mixer with a paddle attachment, spend about five minutes creaming the butter, sugar and lemon zest on medium-high speed until the mixture is light and fluffy. Scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed.

Add the eggs, one at a time, scraping down the sides of the bowl after each addition. Add one-third of the flour mixture to the batter and mix until just combined. Then mix in half of the buttermilk mixture. Repeat with the next third of the flour mixture, followed by the second half of the buttermilk. Finish with the last third of the flour mixture. Scrape down the sides of the bowl occasionally. Gently fold in rhubarb.

Spread the batter into the prepared pan, sprinkle the frozen crumb topping over the cake. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until golden. A toothpick should come out with just a few crumbs on it.

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