

FOOD FEATURE



PRETTY DELICIOUS IN PINK

KITCHEN DIVA PHOTO

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BY ANGELA SHELF MEDEARIS AND GINA HARLOW
THE KITCHEN DIVA

Get ready to pucker up. Because it's time for rhubarb — a sweet, tart treat. Loved by many, and misunderstood by more than a few, rhubarb with its deep-pink stalks is often a little hard to find. But keep searching because this jewel of spring is not to be missed.

Rhubarb can be a rare discovery, even when in season. For many, it's still a taste never tried. Others may have tasted rhubarb that had fallen into the wrong hands, leaving them with an unfortunate first impression. So why doesn't this lovely fruit have a wider appeal? For

starters, it's not technically a fruit, but a herbaceous perennial vegetable. However, in 1947 a New York State court decided that since it was most frequently used as a fruit, it would be classified for regulation and duty purposes as such.

Rhubarb is at its best when the stalks are thin, red and have a crisp texture. If the stalks are floppy, it means that it's not freshly picked. Wrap rhubarb stalks in plastic and refrigerate for up to a week. Rhubarb also is sold frozen in some areas and can be used in place of fresh.

It's true that some parts of the plant are poisonous. The colorful stalks are what we eat, but the leaves contain toxins. This usually is not a problem, as the rhubarb in the mar-

ket already has the leaves removed. Those lucky enough to have their own rhubarb plant know about this minor imperfection and handle it appropriately.

The lip-puckering, tart flavor of rhubarb also requires some getting used to. Some varieties are sweeter than others and can be eaten raw, but that's not common. Rhubarb really comes alive when it is cooked, either stewed or roasted, and mixed with other ingredients. In sweet and savory dishes, this tart vegetable lends a special flavor that can't be compared to anything else.

Its gorgeous pink color is an indicator that rhubarb is full of antioxidants, as well as calcium and fiber. Rhubarb will keep in your refrigerator for up to a week, but to enjoy its full flavor, use it right after buying or harvesting.

Rhubarb is often called the "pie plant." It is delicious when mixed with strawberries and other fruit in pies and cobblers.

It's also good in relishes and compotes, and in dishes that showcase its tangy flavor.

Rhubarb is the star of this recipe for Pork Chops with Spicy Rhubarb and Golden Raisin Sauce. The tartness of the rhubarb combined with the sweetness of the raisins is the perfect complement for the richness of the pork chops.

— Angela Shelf Medearis is an award-winning children's author, culinary historian and author of seven cookbooks. Her new cookbook is "The Kitchen Diva's Diabetic Cookbook." Her website is www.divapro.com. To see how-to videos, recipes and much, much more, Like Angela Shelf Medearis, The Kitchen Diva! on Facebook. Read Gina Harlow's blog about food and gardening at www.peachesandprosciutto.com. Recipes may not be reprinted without permission from Angela Shelf Medearis

PORK CHOPS WITH SPICY RHUBARB AND SAUCE

- 1/2 cup golden raisins
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon plus 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup finely chopped onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 small jalapeno, with ribs and seeds, diced
- 8 to 10 ounces rhubarb, ends trimmed, cut cross-wise into 1/2-inch pieces (2 cups)
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons poultry seasoning
- 4 pork loin chops, (each 1/2 inch thick and 6 to 8 ounces)

1. In a small bowl, combine raisins with vinegar, Worcestershire sauce and 1/4 cup hot water; let stand 10 minutes to soften.

2. In a small saucepan, heat 1 teaspoon oil over medium-low heat. Add onion; cook until softened, 3 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and jalapeno and cook for another 3 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3. Add the rhubarb and sugar; and bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer until rhubarb has softened, 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in nutmeg; season with 1/2 teaspoon of the salt and pepper. Remove from heat; keep warm.

4. Generously season both sides of pork chops with the remaining teaspoon of salt and pepper, and the poultry seasoning.

5. In a large skillet, heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat. Cook pork (in two batches, if necessary, to avoid crowding the pan) until browned and cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Serve topped with the warm Spicy Rhubarb and Golden Raisin sauce. Serves 4.

TIP: The golden raisins can be replaced with other dried fruit, such as cherries or currants and softened as instructed.



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