

WHAT Although the slender pink stalks are considered a vegetable botanically (they're in the buckwheat family and related to sorrel), rhubarb tastes best cooked more like a fruit.

WHY TRY Rhubarb's bracing tartness is delicious when tamed with sugar during cooking. And it can go sweet or savory—rhubarb tastes as good with braised vegetables and roasted meats as it does in a compote or tart.

HOW TO BUY AND STORE At the market, look for firm stalks that are glossy and smooth. Stalks of a medium thickness will have the best texture. Hothouse-grown rhubarb, which comes to market in winter and early spring, is light pink or light red and often tinged with yellow-green. Field-grown, which appears in late spring, is a more vibrant color. Both are flavorful. Wrapped in plastic and unwashed, rhubarb will keep for three to seven days in the fridge. The leaves, which are toxic, should be removed and thrown away.

3 MORE TO TRY

CHUTNEY: Simmer sliced rhubarb with sugar, vinegar, a cinnamon stick, fresh

ginger, and a few strips of orange peel for an Indian-style condiment that's perfect with pork or lamb chops.

CRISP: Toss sliced rhubarb with sugar, flour, and lemon peel; cover with a streusel topping. Bake until bubbling.

FOOL: Boil sliced rhubarb with sugar and orange juice until soft; add a handful of raspberries toward the end of cooking time. Chill, then fold into softly whipped cream. Serve in goblets for a classic English dessert.

BEET, RHUBARB, AND ORANGE SALAD

6 SERVINGS

CALORIES 300 FAT 16 g FIBER 4 g

- 8 2- to 2½-inch-diameter red or yellow beets, 4 of each color if available
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- Coarse kosher salt
- 3 cups water
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 pound trimmed rhubarb stalks, cut diagonally into ½-inch-thick slices
- 3 large oranges
- 2 tablespoons unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon minced shallot

HEALTH MATTERS

Eating **RHUBARB** may help promote strong bones: One cup cooked contains more than one-third of the recommended daily dose of calcium

and is an excellent source of vitamin K, which helps with calcium metabolism. Rhubarb is a very good source of dietary fiber and also contains vitamin C.

- 1 teaspoon honey
- 3 cups watercress sprigs
- 1¼ cups coarsely crumbled feta cheese (about one 7-ounce package)
- Fresh chervil leaves (optional)

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place beets on large sheet of foil. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon olive oil; sprinkle with coarse salt. Wrap beets in foil. Roast beets until tender when pierced with fork, about 1 hour. Unwrap and cool beets. Peel, then cut each into 8 wedges.

Bring 3 cups water, ½ cup sugar, and pinch of coarse salt to simmer in large saucepan, stirring until sugar dissolves. Add rhubarb. Simmer over medium heat until just tender but still intact, 1 to 2 minutes (do not overcook or rhubarb will be mushy). Using slotted spoon, transfer rhubarb to platter and cool completely.

DO AHEAD Beets and rhubarb can be made 1 day ahead. Cover separately and chill.

Finely grate enough peel from 1 orange to measure ½ teaspoon; transfer to small bowl and reserve for dressing. Cut off peel and white pith from all oranges. Working over medium bowl to catch juice and using small sharp knife, cut between membranes to release orange segments into bowl; squeeze membranes to release juice into bowl. Transfer 2 tablespoons orange juice to bowl with orange peel. Whisk vinegar, lemon juice, shallot, honey, and remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil into bowl with orange peel and orange juice mixture. Season dressing with coarse salt and pepper.

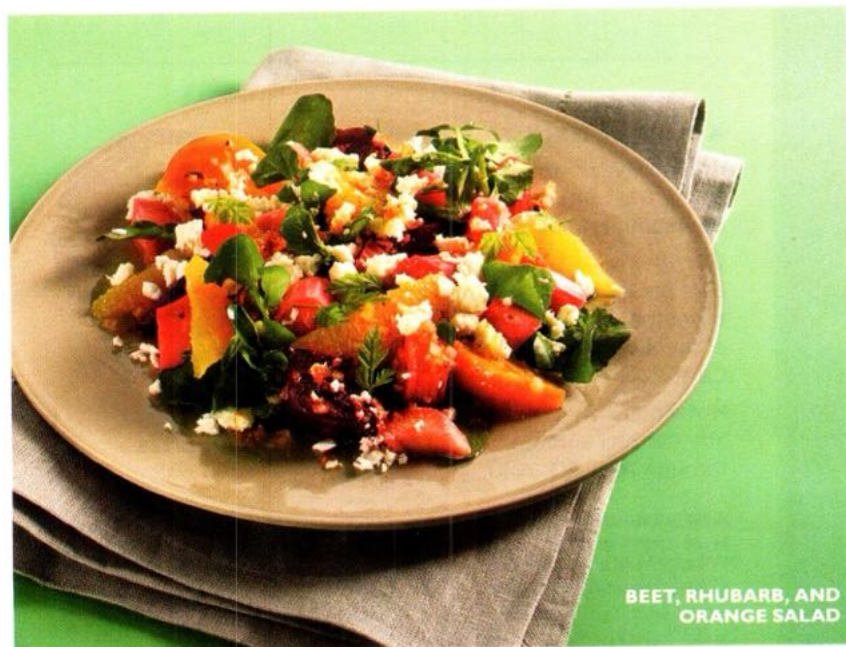
Arrange watercress, beets, rhubarb, and orange segments on 6 plates. Sprinkle with feta and drizzle with dressing. Garnish with chervil leaves, if desired, and serve.

RHUBARB AND STRAWBERRY BREAKFAST CROSTINI

6 SERVINGS You'll get about five cups of preserves from this recipe. Try leftovers alongside soft cheeses or over vanilla ice cream. Fresh ricotta is available at some supermarkets and at specialty foods stores and Italian markets.

CALORIES 199 FAT 5 g FIBER 1 g

- 1½ pounds trimmed rhubarb, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 cup sugar ▶▶



BEET, RHUBARB, AND ORANGE SALAD