

Rhubarb and Other Stuff

One of my favorite memories is, as a small boy, sitting on the porch with my siblings eating a stalk of raw rhubarb and dipping the end after each bite into a small bowl of white sugar. We would sometimes playfully challenge each other to eat the tart stalk without sugar but mostly we just sat and ate and talked. AS I grew older, I realized that it was my parents' way of providing us with a treat that did not cost a lot (we could not afford a lot). Almost everyone in the neighborhood had a few rhubarb plants against their house and there was always someone trying to give it away. But right up to today, rhubarb remains my favorite fruit. I rarely eat it raw any more but I have adapted my mother's recipe for rhubarb compote and usually have some in the fridge.

Rhubarb Compote

This cooked fruit is best done in small batches. I have found that 4 to 6 cups is enough to last several weeks.

Ingredients

4 cups chopped rhubarb (can be fresh or frozen)
2 cups white sugar (can be reduced if you like it tart)
2 cups strawberries or raspberries – optional

Instructions

Put rhubarb and sugar in a large pot and cook over medium to medium-low heat. When the mixture begins to bubble, reduce heat and simmer for up to 1 1/2 hours (until the rhubarb is very soft). Stir frequently and do not allow the fruit to boil as it will add a bitter taste to it. If you are going to add strawberries or raspberries, wait until the rhubarb has been cooking for 45 minutes or so and then add the extra fruit all at once.

Once the fruit is cooked, allow the mixture to cool and place it in small jars or plastic containers. It can be frozen in the plastic containers or in freezer bags. It is a versatile compote that can be used many different ways. For example, I like it on toast or as a topping for vanilla ice cream. It is a special treat on fresh cornbread (recipe below) or in tarts (recipe below).

Note: I have made several batches at once – each slightly different (for example, plain rhubarb, rhubarb and strawberry, and rhubarb and raspberry) so that I have a choice when the urge for rhubarb hits me.

Rhubarb Tarts

Ingredients

Rhubarb Compote

Plain Yogurt

Tart Shells

Instructions

Bake the tart shells according to package directions and allow them to cool. When it is time for dessert, add one spoonful of yogurt and one spoonful of rhubarb compote to each tart and enjoy. Do not add the fillings beforehand as the tart shells will get soggy quickly.

These tarts are less calories and more fun than the traditional strawberry rhubarb pie and I heartily recommend them. They are a bit messy so keep the napkins handy.

Basic Cornmeal Muffins

Ingredients

¾ cup Cornmeal
1 ¼ cups milk
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/3 cup granulated sugar
1 tbsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
1 egg
¼ cup margarine (melted)

Preheat oven to 400°F and place cupcake papers* into the muffin tins. Combine cornmeal and milk in a small bowl and let stand 5 to 10 minutes. Combine flour, sugar, salt and baking powder in a large bowl. Add the egg and melted margarine to the cornmeal mixture and stir well. Add to dry ingredients and mix until just combined. Spoon into muffin tins and bake for 15 to 18 minutes (until a toothpick comes out clean). Makes 12 muffins.

Serve warm with butter and your choice of jams or jellies.

*Instead of cupcake papers, you can grease the muffin tins but I find that the muffins have a tendency to be more difficult to remove without the cupcake papers.

Jalapeño Cornmeal Muffins

Add ¼ to 1/3 cup of finely chopped jalapeño peppers (deveined and deseeded) to the mixture just before putting it into the muffin tins. Bake as per the regular recipe.

Serve warm with butter and lime marmalade.

Annette's Rhubarb Muffins

These are best made with fresh rhubarb but you can substitute frozen rhubarb although the muffins won't be quite as good.

Topping Ingredients:

¼ cup brown sugar
½ tsp cinnamon
2 tsp. margarine or butter, melted
¼ cup chopped nuts

Muffin Ingredients:

½ cup plain yogurt
¼ cup vegetable oil
1 large egg
1 ⅓ cups all-purpose flour
1 cup diced rhubarb
⅔ cup brown sugar (I prefer demerara sugar)
½ tsp baking soda
¼ tsp salt

Cake Instructions:

In small bowl, blend together yogurt, oil and egg. Set aside

In another bowl, stir together flour, rhubarb, sugar, baking soda & salt. Stir in yogurt mixture just until moistened. Drop by spoonfuls into 12 greased muffin cups.

Topping Instructions:

In custard cup or small bowl, combine all topping ingredients. Spoon a little topping onto each muffin. Bake in 350° oven for 25-30 minutes or until firm to the touch.

Makes 12 muffins