

Seasonal Eating
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Welcome Spring with Strawberries and Rhubarb
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Ahh, spring. Out of the heavy, brown, meat and potatoes comfort meals of winter and into the colorful, bright, fresh produce of the season. Asparagus, spinach, broccoli and the jewels of the season, strawberries and rhubarb.

Strawberries are a fruit everyone understands and welcomes in the spring. I mean what's not to love? Beautiful red, sweet, flavorful on their own or useful in so many desserts and jams or even roasted into a sauce for chicken or combined with hot peppers for a sweet and sassy salsa. Rhubarb on the other hand is another story. Every time I'm at the checkout at the grocery store, they ask me "What is this?" and on grocery store tours I have to explain about the long red celery.



My Dad grew rhubarb in our Utah garden when I was a child. I just remember him warning us not to eat the leaves – so I never went near the plant. But my parents enjoyed the rhubarb stalks. It wasn't until I was an adult that I truly learned to appreciate the wonderful tanginess and versatility that these stalks have to offer.

Rhubarb is usually sold at the grocery store without the leaves. It's just a long red celery looking stalk. But if you do get the leaves, just be sure to cut them off and discard as they are mildly toxic and shouldn't be eaten. The stems are fine to eat and can be chopped and added to desserts and baked goods. They also cook down and become soft to make great sauces and jams. They are very tart and, as Doug Dezotell has mentioned in his columns, need a cup of sugar to go with them!

A couple of years ago I decided to experiment with rhubarb and made an Orange Rhubarb Quick Bread that was wonderful (visit bedford.tennessee.edu for the recipe). Of course the queen of pairings is with strawberries. The super tart flavor of the rhubarb combined with the sweet berries makes fabulous pies, tarts, sauces and jams.

The local strawberries are in and this week I visited a couple of our Bedford County berry producers and experimented with a Strawberry Rhubarb Crisp. I love the crispy topping over bubbly fruit and this is fairly easy to make. It is in a 9"x13" pan so is good for a group or to take to a potluck.

So get out there and enjoy the local berries – they're only here for a short time! For more recipes and information about seasonal eating, visit the Bedford County Extension website (bedford.tennessee.edu).

Strawberry Rhubarb Crisp

2 cups diced rhubarb, about 3 stalks
6 cups hulled and halved strawberries
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
10 drops red food coloring, optional
Zest of one orange
3 tablespoons cornstarch
2 1/4 cups flour
3/4 cup sugar
1/4 + 1/8 teaspoon salt
16 tablespoons butter, melted
1 cup chopped pecans

In a large bowl, stir together rhubarb, strawberries, sugar, salt, vanilla, food coloring, orange zest and cornstarch until there are no more white streaks. Pour into a 9"x13" baking dish. In another bowl, mix together flour, sugar, salt, butter and pecans. Sprinkle over the top of the berry mixture in the pan, breaking dough into small clumps. Bake at 350 degrees for 50 minutes, until browned and bubbly.