

**Seasonal Eating**  
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**.Rhubarb Springs into Seasonal Desserts**  
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When the days start warming up a little and start to get a little longer, we look forward to the spring produce. I was in the grocery store the other day and looked up to see a sure sign of spring – rhubarb. It's very seasonal and only available fresh in the spring.

Most people skip over the rhubarb or don't even know what it is. But those long stalks that look like red ribs of celery have a wonderful, tangy flavor that is unique and delicious. It cooks down to a soft texture and can be mashed or left in pieces. The leaves of the plant are poisonous so it is sold as just the stalks, which are the edible part.

Rhubarb is very tart on its own – so it is usually cooked and combined with some type of sweetener. Most often it is used in a sauce or a dessert. Sauces with just a little sweetener make a good accompaniment to chicken or pork because of the tart flavor. Sweeter sauces or roasted sweetened rhubarb makes a good topping for ice cream. In desserts, it is used in cobblers and pies and is often combined with strawberries, another spring favorite. It also shows up in quick breads and muffins.

If there are any loose “strings” down your stalks, you can peel them off but it isn't necessary. In season rhubarb is usually tender enough. Just use a sharp knife to cut cleanly through the stalks

The recipe below is a quick, no-bake cheesecake on top of a graham cracker crust and topped with baked rhubarb. The rhubarb is combined with brown sugar for the sweetener and orange zest and juice. When it cooks down, it becomes a pink color. Almond complements rhubarb and shows up in the crust and as a garnish on top as well as a little almond extract in the cheesecake.

So, if you're looking for a different spring dessert or a new twist for Easter, give these cheesecake bars a try. For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at [bedford.tennessee.edu](http://bedford.tennessee.edu).

**Rhubarb Cheesecake Bars**

- 1 cup sliced almonds, toasted, divided
- 5 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 1/2 cup brown sugar, divided
- 1 pound rhubarb, washed and sliced into 1/4" slices
- zest of 1 orange



2 tablespoons orange juice  
8 ounces cream cheese, softened  
1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1/2 teaspoon almond extract  
1/3 cup lemon juice

Chop half of the sliced almonds and set the rest aside for later. In a bowl, combine the chopped almonds, melted butter, graham cracker crumbs and 1/4 cup of the brown sugar. Stir until all is moistened. Spray a square 9"x9" pan with vegetable spray and press the crumb mixture into the bottom. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 minutes. Let cool.

While the crust is cooling, prepare the rhubarb. In a bowl, combine the rhubarb, remaining 1/4 cup brown sugar, orange zest and orange juice. Pour into a baking dish or pie plate and bake at 350 degrees for 30-45 minutes, until tender. Let cool.

When the crust is cooled, in a mixer bowl, beat the cream cheese until smooth. Drizzle in the sweetened condensed milk, beating until smooth and combined. Add the vanilla and lemon juice and stir to combine. Pour into the cooled crust, cover with plastic wrap and chill for several hours in the refrigerator.

When ready to serve, cut the cheesecake mixture into 9 squares. Place on a serving plate and spoon the rhubarb over the top. Sprinkle with remaining sliced almonds and serve immediately. Store the cheesecake and rhubarb in separate containers in the refrigerator.