

Grow a Healthy Child by Growing Vegetables



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Wish your child would eat more vegetables? Wish you would eat more vegetables? Children that grow vegetables eat more vegetables than those who don't. Some easy vegetables to grow with your child are peas, beans, radishes, and lettuce.

One of the easiest vegetables to grow is rhubarb. That's right! Rhubarb is a vegetable. Being a native of Siberia might be why it's easy to grow in Nebraska. I remember as a kid, pulling and nibbling on the tiniest super-sour red stalks, a taste similar to today's sour gummy candy if you dip it in some sugar.

To start rhubarb in your garden, go to a nursery or ask an acquaintance who has a rhubarb plant for part of a root. You will want to bury in a place that doesn't get tilled or spaded each year. Once the rhubarb plant is established it will return on its own every spring. Let your child help dig the hole and plant the rhubarb so they feel some ownership. Water when planting and throughout the growing season as needed.

Children will enjoy harvesting this early ripening vegetable. When the stalks are pink and about the size of your finger pull the stalk from the ground. It will break about an inch below the ground surface. Cut off the large leaves and any blemishes. Older children might enjoy using the leaves for a hat or a water pool for small toys. Just be sure to remind them not to eat the leaves; they can be toxic! Stalks are for eating and leaves are for play (or composting).

For more information check out Food Fun for Young Children at:
<http://go.unl.edu/chi>



Rhubarb is nutritious.

½ cup provides:

- 20% of a young child's daily Vitamin C needed (5 mg)
- 57 grams water
- 1.1 gram fiber (5%)
- 52 mg calcium (5%)
- 7 mg magnesium (5%)
- 175 mg potassium (5%)

The tartness of rhubarb remains when cooked and pairs well with sweet fruits such as strawberries and mangos, vanilla or almond flavoring, milk or cream, fatty fish or meat, and even mild flavored vegetables such as leaf lettuce.ⁱⁱ



Your child can help you cook the pie recipe at right or cook a simple sauce with 4 cups chopped rhubarb and 1 cup sugar (add 1 teaspoon vanilla flavor after the sauce has cooked 4-8 hours in a small slow cooker).

Tasks your child can do are washing the stalks, putting the ½" cut pieces in a measuring cup, measuring ingredients, stirring and any other task that you demonstrate and explain in detail to them.



More rhubarb recipes can be found at:

- Rhubarb Fact sheet from Nebraska Extension's Nutrition Education Program:
<http://food.unl.edu/documents/Rhubarb.pdf>
- Rhubarb Recipes from Nebraska Extension:
<http://go.unl.edu/if5g>
- Preserving Rhubarb from Nebraska Extension:
<http://go.unl.edu/gbgf>

Although most rhubarb recipes do include sugar, rhubarb is filled with these nutrients: vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, potassium and many anti-oxidants.ⁱⁱⁱ It is a healthy trade-off to get your child and you eating more vegetables. And rhubarb is an easy way to start gardening with your kids!



Rhubarb Custard Pie

(serves 8)

- 1 unbaked pie crust
- 4 cups fresh rhubarb, cut to ½" pieces*
- 2 cups (or less) sugar*
- 3 tablespoons tapioca (or corn) starch
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla flavor
- 3 tablespoons plain Greek yogurt

1. Press an unbaked pie crust into a pie plate crimping the edges.
2. Coat rhubarb pieces with the dry ingredients.
3. Add eggs, vanilla and yogurt. Stir till mixed well.
4. Fill the unbaked pie crust with the rhubarb mixture.
5. Cover the crust edges with foil to prevent over browning. Bake 20 minutes at 400°.
6. Reduce temperature to 325° and bake 40 minutes more or until done.
7. Let cool completely and refrigerate.

*Substitute a 3 ounce package of strawberry gelatin for part of the sugar or use strawberries for 1-2 cups of the rhubarb.

Sources:

ⁱ Davis J, Spaniol M, Somerset S. Sustainance and sustainability: maximizing the impact of school gardens on health outcomes. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2015;18(13):2358-2367

ⁱⁱ Segnit, Niki. *The Flavor Thesaurus*, Bloomsbury: New York, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Composition Database, <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/>, accessed May 25, 2016.