

Rhubarb & yoghurt cake

This cake is so easy – you can throw it together in ten minutes. Rhubarb, orange and yoghurt make a delicious combination. But you could omit the orange flower water, or substitute rose water, or just use vanilla. Enjoy the cake warm or cold, at tea time or for dessert. It pairs beautifully with a dollop of creamy yoghurt. The recipe is adapted from one by Leanne Kitchen.



Serves: 12

300g rhubarb (forced or field), thinly sliced

310g self-raising flour

230g caster sugar

zest of one orange

pinch of salt

2 eggs

125g plain yoghurt

1 tsp vanilla essence

1 tbsp orange flower water

125g unsalted butter, melted + extra to grease tin

1. Grease and line a 9" cake tin. Heat oven to 180C with a rack in the middle.
2. Mix together dry ingredients (first five in list).
3. Mix together wet ingredients (last five in list).
4. Incorporate wets into dries, just until no dry patches are left. Do not over-mix.
5. Pour into prepared tin, level off and bake 50 mins or until just cooked through and golden brown.
6. Let cool in tin 15 mins then carefully turn out to finish cooling on a rack.

Rhubarb notes



Rhubarb originates from Mongolia. The word was coined in medieval Latin and derives from '*Rha*' (old name for the Volga river) and '*barbarum*' (foreign) - ie a vegetable from the foreign lands east of the Volga.

Rhubarb was pronounced a 'fruit' in 1947 by confused US customs officials who opted to classify by its use in desserts rather than its botanical status.

But rhubarb as pudding, even as food, is a relatively recent concept. For centuries it was used in China and elsewhere purely for medicinal purposes. Rhubarb is a great laxative, if you eat enough. It wasn't until the 17th or 18th century that rhubarb became a food crop in England, reaching its peak of popularity in the 'rhubarb boom' between the 1st and 2nd world wars. Being so tart, the easy availability of sugar was needed for the vegetable/fruit to catch on with home cooks.

There is still a rhubarb festival each year in Wakefield, one corner of the famous 'rhubarb triangle', where it has been an important part of the economy for 150 years. (The other corners are Leeds and Morley.)

There are two types on sale: 1) In winter, slender pink stems of 'forced' rhubarb, grown in the dark and harvested by candlelight; 2) In spring, fatter red or green stems from bushes grown in the fields. Both are good.

However delicious you find it, don't eat more than a few tonnes as the stems are mildly poisonous. The leaves contain more of the poison (oxalic acid and oxalate salts), but you'd need to eat 10lbs for them to be lethal.

Buy bright, solid stems and store in the fridge wrapped in damp paper or cloth inside a plastic bag for up to three weeks. And don't forget rhubarb's "immense worth in a world in need of mild dependable relief from its ever recurrent constipation." (Clifford Faust, 1992)