



What's in Season?



The rhubarb season runs from April to September, although it can be grown forced which accounts for its availability early in the year when other crops are scarce. Early forced rhubarb has a distinctive bright pink colour and delicate flavour, regarded by some as the finest in the world. In order to 'force', the vegetable, the roots of the early rhubarb are dug up between November and January and replanted in huge sheds. Six weeks later the rhubarb is picked in true Victorian style, by candlelight, to allow as little natural light as possible to reach the plants and harm their tender pink stalks. Outdoor rhubarb is a little darker in colour.

Rhubarb

Despite its being commonly regarded as a fruit, rhubarb is actually a close relative of garden sorrel, and is therefore a member of the vegetable family. Rhubarb's crisp sour stalks are rich in vitamin C, dietary fibre and calcium, although the calcium is combined with oxalic acid and so is not easily absorbed by the body. The leaves of rhubarb should never be eaten as they contain toxic levels of oxalic acid.

When buying rhubarb choose fresh crisp stalks, and peel off any stringy covering before use. Stand the stalks in cold water for an hour or so to refresh them before cooking. Otherwise store in the fridge, and eat within three days of purchase. Rhubarb is incredibly versatile with many culinary uses; try it in cakes and desserts, pastries, jams, pickles, preserves, sauces and, of course, wine.

March

Vegetables: Calabrese, Purple Sprouting, Carrots, Spring Greens, Spring Onions and all winter vegetables.

Fruit and Nuts: The first Rhubarb.

Game: Matured Partridge, Pheasant, Mallard, Pigeon, Rabbit and Hare.

Fish: Mackerel, Halibut and Bass. The flat fish are beginning to spawn now so their quality declines. Wild Salmon and Sea Trout.

Cheese: Cotherstone, Wensleydale, Coulommiers, Comte, Banon and Roquefort.

April

Vegetables: Spring Cabbages and Carrots. All winter root vegetables now on their last legs but the first new potatoes from Jersey are in. Leeks and the first Lettuces and other salad leaves. The short Morel season begins.

Fruit: Height of the Rhubarb season.

Meat: Welsh lamb.

Game: Matured Partridge, Pheasant, Mallard, Pigeon, Rabbit and Hare.

Fish: The first Crabs, Salmon Trout, Lobster and Shrimps.