Hoquiam Farmers Market News - Rhubarb Recipe Edition

Local News

Posted by: Anonymous

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The sun is shining, and Spring is hovering, stepping on Winter’s heels. Pretty soon Winter will get discouraged and realize that the game is up and it’s time to fade away completely. So bring on the seed catalogues!
I love looking at those bright glossy photos of perfect flowers and vegetables. My heart yearns for a garden that is so voluptuous, so enticing that spending hours shoveling compost and manure becomes an act of passion. Yes, gardening is a sexy hobby!

According to those who track this sort of thing, there were 29% more home gardeners in 2009 than in the previous year. That’s a huge increase! Perhaps we are turning away from the excess of consumer spending and finally discovering the joys that come with harvesting your first handful of carrots, or of having such an abundance of lettuce that you can offer your friends leafy greens in addition to your love!

The Hoquiam Farmers Market has a table laden with seed catalogues, and many experienced gardeners who are willing, actually anxious, to share their wise words of wisdom. Pitfalls can be avoided if you just ask Pat if she recommends trying your hand at basil. She might suggest that you start with beans. Build your confidence before trying the prima donnas of the vegetable world. Maybe your garden plot is in a sunny microclimate, and corn will come up thinking that it’s in Kansas- but not at our house!

Rhubarb is a luscious, tart, and tasty treat that loves Grays Harbor weather! Judy has divided her enormous plants, and has large pots ready to be plunked into your garden. In no time at all the stalks and leaves will be stretching their way outward, and you will be able to harvest your first crop before the pea and bean seeds even go into the soil! This is the time of year for planting berry canes, and we have raspberry, blueberry, loganberry, and marionberry. Strawberry plants are also available, along with sage, chives, and columbine.

How I wish that salmonberries were just a bit more flavorful. We could all retire as gentleman farmers if the berries became popular, because those berries would take over every square inch of ground in the county if we let them. We’ve already begun the annual hacking back of the salmonberry bushes, reclaiming precious ground. Why they haven’t been named an invasive species, I can’t tell you. After that rant, I’m almost embarrassed to admit how much I enjoy plucking the fruit off the cane for a quick snack. The deep red ones look like rubies, and have a more intense flavor. Naturally, they are harder to find!

Our forest gleaner and harvester Doug brought in Hedgehog and yellow foot Chanterelle mushrooms this week! Another sign of impending Spring! He promises to have Fiddlehead Ferns at the Market by Saturday morning. I pushed for Friday, and maybe he’ll bring them early! Fiddlehead Fern aficionados adore these tender green sprigs and cook them up much like asparagus. Seattle chefs

at the most elite restaurants count themselves fortunate if they occasionally have enough to offer a single Fiddlehead in a dish, but we are blessed with the natural abundance of heaping platters.

Nancy is baking Rhubarb and Strawberry Rhubarb pies this week! Oh Bliss! Fresh Rhubarb stalks have the loveliest aroma when you cut into them, and as they cook up the flavor expands and deepens. The sweet-tart taste can’t be compared to any other fruit that I know of, and for me, Rhubarb is an instant flashback to childhood. My Grandma Bennett used to make a Rhubarb, Strawberry, and Pineapple jam that was over-the-top delicious. Now that my own Rhubarb is coming up well, I’m planning on trying to replicate her recipe. I found one which sounds similar;
2 cups diced Rhubarb
2 cups fresh or canned crushed pineapple (Grandma used chunks)
1 pint strawberries
4 cups sugar
Combine fruits in large pot. Gently stir in sugar. Let stand about 15 minutes (no heat!) To let the juices begin to flow. Bring jam to a boil, stirring occasionally for 15 or 20 minutes. Ladle into hot, clean jars and process in hot water canning bath for 10 minutes.
Wouldn’t this be incredible to serve over vanilla ice cream? Grandma always made that from scratch too! We can delve into that process later, when summer and hand-churned ice cream season has arrived.

Come on in for a look at our seed catalogues, get our gardening advice (oh yeah, we even have a great little book on 50 effective methods of slug control!), starter plants, and the best darned Rhubarb pie since my Grandma was in her prime!

Barbara Bennett Parsons, not a master gardener, but an enthusiastic one!
Grays Harbor Public Market, at 1958 Riverside in Hoquiam
open Wed & Thu. 9-5, Fri. & Sat. 9-6, and Sunday 10-4