



CHAPTER FIVE

PUDDINGS

RHUBARB. –This is one of the most useful of all garden productions that are put into pies and puddings. It was comparatively little known till within the last twenty or thirty years, but it is now cultivated in almost every British garden. The part used is the footstalks of the leaves, which, peeled and cut into small pieces are put into tarts, either mixed with apples or alone. When quite young, they are much better not peeled. Rhubarb comes in season when apples are going out. The common rhubarb is a native of Asia; the scarlet variety has the finest flavour. Turkey rhubarb, the well-known medicinal drug, is the root of a very elegant plant (*Rheum palmatum*), coming to greatest perfection in Tartary. For culinary purposes, all kinds of rhubarb are the better for being blanched.

Beeton 1861, §1339

I quoted some early recipes for rhubarb tarts and rhubarb pies in the introduction. But there is, of course, an infinity of them spread across Regency and Victorian literature, each having something useful to tell us although, to be frank, the level of imaginative tinkering is not very great. The rhubarb pie given by Meg Dods in her fourth edition of 1829 reads as follows:

806. Rhubarb-pie. – Peel off the skin from stalks of young rhubarb, and cut them slantwise into bits of about an inch and a half. Stew them slowly in sugar, or in butter, and a little water, till soft: mash, sweeten, and make them into a covered pie or open tart. – *Obs.* Gooseberry, apple, rhubarb, and other fruit pies, eat very well cold; or the fruit may be stewed and sweetened for common





use, without further preparation. Fresh good cream is a very great improvement to all fruit pies and tarts. The next best thing is plain custard. In England the cream is often sweetened, thickened with beat yolks of eggs, and poured over the fruit. In Scotland cream for tarts is usually served either plain or merely whisked; or served over the stewed fruit whipt.

Dods goes on to suggest a delicious rhubarb pasty or turnover. In Tierra del Fuego, where soft fruit is hard to find and rhubarb has been introduced (just as in Scotland) something very similar is eaten: a rhubarb *empanada*. It is made with hot-water crust in turnover form and is remarkably similar.

816. *Common apple, gooseberry, or rhubarb pasties or turnovers.* – Make a hot crust with dripping or lard melting in boiling water; roll it out quickly, and cut it so as to be of a semicircular form when turned over. Lay stewed apples, rhubarb, or scalded gooseberries, in the crust, with moist sugar to sweeten; add, if apples, quince, lemon-peel, or cinnamon. Cut the edges, double up and pinch the crust, and bake the pasties in a moderate oven. If there be icing at hand they may be iced. – *Obs.* This is a cheap preparation and a greater favourite with young persons than those that are more delicate and expensive.

The Victorian royal chef Charles Francatelli was somewhat overshadowed by his more flamboyant contemporary Alexis Soyer. None the less, the rhubarb pie included in his *Plain Cookery Book for the Working Classes* (1852) is well explained and worth citing.

NO. 98. RHUBARB PIE.

A bundle of rhubarb, one pound of flour, six ounces of butter, or lard, or dripping, half a pint of water, a pinch





of salt, ditto of baking-powder, eight ounces of moist sugar. First, cut up the rhubarb in pieces about an inch long, wash them in plenty of water, and drain them in a colander, or sieve. Next, place the flour in a pan, or on the table, make a hollow in the middle with your fist, place the salt and the baking-powder in it, pour in the water to dissolve them, then add the butter; mix all together by working the ingredients with the fingers of both hands, until the whole has become a firm, smooth, compact kind of paste. You now put the cleaned rhubarb into a pie-dish, with the sugar and a gill of water, roll out the paste to the exact size of the dish, and after wetting the edges of the dish all round, place the rolled-out paste upon it, and by pressing the thumb of the right hand all round the upper part of the edge, the paste will be effectually fastened on, so as to prevent the juice from running out at the sides; a small hole the size of a sixpence must be made at the top of the pie, for ventilation, or otherwise the pie would burst. Bake the pie for an hour and a quarter.

The rhubarb pie that was suggested by Mrs Annabella P. Hill in her *New Cook Book*, first published in 1867 in America, had a top and bottom crust, as well as some nice spicing that might not go amiss today. Remember that in America, the common or slang name for rhubarb was pie plant (Merriam-Webster dates its first appearance to 1838). The great cookery writer May Byron, whose *Pudding Book* and *Jam Book* are valuable compendiums of recipes and advice, comments that American pies are like our English pies in ‘only one respect, the fundamental fact of being covered. Otherwise, instead of being deep, they are shallow; instead of being oval, they are round; instead of occupying pie-dishes, they are made in plates. Not seldom the under and upper crust, when baked, are slit asunder as it were a muffin, more contents inserted, and the pie-top replaced as if nothing had happened.’





596. *Rhubarb Pie*. – Take the tender stalks of the rhubarb; remove the skin; cut the pieces an inch long. Line the pie-plate with paste; put a layer of rhubarb and a layer of sugar, sprinkled over thick; continue this until the paste is nearly filled. Sprinkle grated lemon peel and pulverized coriander seed between each layer for flavoring; a heaped teaspoonful of flour to each pie sprinkled between the layers; add half a teacup of water; put on an upper crust, pinch the edges down carefully, and cut a slit in the centre. Bake *slowly* an hour. In all pies where there is not sufficient fruit to prevent the crust from falling in, before placing on the upper crust, cross three stout straws on the top of the pie-plate to support the crust. When the pie is done, the crust may be loosened with a pen-knife or other small instrument sufficiently to enable you to remove the straws. Tin plates are better than earthen for baking pies.

While Mrs Hill proposed lemon peel and ground coriander to season the rhubarb, an English author writing in 1874 suggested giving it some edge (as if more were needed) by adding green lime juice or ‘in default of this, ... the juice of a lemon, and that of a Seville orange.’ The writer of these words was the Reverend Henry Southgate, who penned *Things a Lady Would Like to Know* from his genteel home at Woodbine, Sidmouth, Devon. Another, apparently traditional, English seasoning can be made with the chopped leaves of the herb sweet cicely.

Mrs Beeton had her own rhubarb recipes, both for a tart and a pudding (the pudding one was pinched by the reverend gent. just mentioned for a ladylike dinner in April). Her tart reads like this:

RHUBARB TART.

1339. INGREDIENTS. – $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of puff-paste No. 1206, about 5 sticks of large rhubarb, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of moist sugar.





Mode. – Make a puff-paste by recipe No. 1206; line the edges of a deep pie-dish with it, and wash, wipe, and cut the rhubarb into pieces about 1 inch long. Should it be old and tough, string it, that is to say, pare off the outside skin. Pile the fruit high in the dish as it shrinks very much in the cooking; put in the sugar, cover with crust, ornament the edges, and bake the tart in a well-heated oven from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ hour. If wanted very nice, brush it over with the white of an egg beaten to a stiff froth, then sprinkle on it some sifted sugar, and put it in the oven just to set the glaze: this should be done when the tart is nearly baked. A small quantity of lemon-juice, and a little of the peel minced, are by many persons considered an improvement to the flavour of rhubarb tart.

Her boiled rhubarb pudding recalls a style of English eating that has to some extent gone out of fashion. She says this recipe will feed 6 or 7 people.

BOILED RHUBARB PUDDING.

1338. INGREDIENTS. – 4 or 5 sticks of fine rhubarb, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of moist sugar, $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. of suet-crust No. 1215.

Mode. – Make a suet-crust with $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. of flour, by recipe No. 1215, and line a buttered basin with it. Wash and wipe the rhubarb, and, if old, string it – that is to say, pare off the outside skin. Cut it into inch lengths, fill the basin with it, put in the sugar, and cover with crust. Pinch the edges of the pudding together, tie over it a floured cloth, put it into boiling water, and boil from 2 to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Turn it out of the basin, and serve with a jug of cream and sifted sugar.





RHUBARB AND ALMOND TART

I was first inspired to try this dish by a recipe from Jenny Mann's *Vegetarian Cuisine* (1982). She proposes a sort of Bakewell tart but you can go the whole hog and include the layer of jam on the bottom and the frangipane sponge filling, scattering the pieces of rhubarb to peep through the finished item. I have not given a recipe for the pastry, presuming those who do not make pastry themselves will buy a good one from the shops, or you can follow the one in the next recipe.

175 g / 6 oz sweet shortcrust pastry

1 kg / 2 lb rhubarb

castor sugar

125 g / 4 oz butter

125 g / 4 oz sugar

2 eggs, beaten

125 g / 4 oz flaked almonds

Make enough pastry to line an 8–9 inch flan case. Roll it out and line the case. Chill for 30 minutes, then trim the edge. Preheat the oven to 400°F/200°C/gas mark 6. Prick the pastry, line it with greaseproof paper and baking beans. Bake for 10 minutes, remove the beans and bake for a further 5 minutes.

Wash and wipe your rhubarb and cut into 2.5 cm/1 inch chunks. Put them in a tray, sprinkle them with castor sugar. Put them into the oven to roast until they are almost tender.

Cream the butter and sugar, then add the beaten eggs. Fold in the almonds. Arrange the rhubarb in the flan case. Pour over the sponge. Put it in an oven preheated to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 5 for 20 minutes or until the top is lightly browned.



LATTICE FRUIT TART

The island of Fair Isle, midway between the Orkneys and Shetland, boasted a population of 400 at the beginning of the twentieth century. Now it is about 70 souls. That is no hindrance to their eating rhubarb. This recipe comes from the *Fair Isle Times*, the one-time community newspaper.

for the pastry

75 g / 3 oz butter

175 g / 6 oz plain flour

1 tbsp castor sugar

1 egg yolk

2 tsp water

for the filling

2 tbsp cornflour

2 tbsp castor sugar

700 g / 1½ lb rhubarb, cut into 2 cm / 1½ inch pieces

2 tbsp redcurrant jelly, warmed

for the topping

175 g / 6 oz margarine or butter, softened

35 g / 1½ oz icing sugar, sifted

175 g / 6 oz plain flour (or try replacing 2 oz flour with ground almonds)

1 tsp almond essence – less if ground almond is used.

To make the pastry, rub butter into the flour, beat the sugar with yolk and water, stir in the flour to form a soft dough. Use this to line the base and sides of a shallow oblong baking tray measuring 20 x 28 cm / 8 x 11 inches. Chill for 20 minutes.

Sprinkle the base with cornflour and sugar. Lay the rhubarb in rows on top. Brush with warmed redcurrant jelly. For the topping, beat the margarine or butter with the icing sugar. Add flour (with or without ground almonds) and essence. Spoon into a large piping bag





fitted with a half-inch star tube. Pipe a lattice over the rhubarb.

Preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F/gas mark 5. Bake for 30–35 minutes. If you want to eat it now, sprinkle with sugar and cut into squares. If you wish to freeze it, you can. Wrap it well and it will keep for 6 months.

Fair Isle Times, 1 June 1984

RHUBARB, ORANGE AND ALMOND CRUMBLE PIE

A magazine recipe from the food-writer Philippa Davenport takes advantage of the perfect match of rhubarb and orange in this heart-warming pie with a crumble topping.

150 g / 5 oz unsalted butter
300 g / 10 oz plain flour
the finely grated zest of an orange
1 tsp castor sugar
2 tbsp orange juice
50 g / 2 oz flaked almonds
75 g / 3 oz pale muscovado sugar
½–1 tsp ground cinnamon
300 g / 10 oz forced rhubarb

Cut up the butter and rub it into the flour. Take 150 g / 5 oz of this mixture out of the bowl and reserve it. Stir the orange zest and castor sugar into the mixture which remains. Use the orange juice to bind it into a short-crust dough, and chill it briefly. Take a 25–30 cm / 10–12 inch fluted flan tin and line it with the pastry. Chill once again. Weigh down the base with greaseproof paper and baking beans, and bake at 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6 for 18–20 minutes, removing the paper and beans after the first 10 minutes.

Reserve a tablespoon of almonds, but crush the rest into small bits and add to the reserved flour and butter.



Make a nutty crumble by adding it to the muscovado sugar and cinnamon. Spread a third of it over the blind-baked pastry case. Then arrange the sliced rhubarb on top of this and sprinkle the remaining crumble over it. Place the pie onto a preheated baking sheet. Bake it at 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6 for 35 minutes, until the fruit is tender but not collapsing, and the crumble crisp and turning brown. Cool 5–10 minutes before serving.

Country Living, February, 1999

COX'S ORANGE AND RHUBARB COMPOTE

This dish should consist of Cox's Orange, or other apples which keep their shape when cooked, in a syrup of their own juices blended with rhubarb. It is delicious eaten warm with the fragrance and aroma of the apple contrasting with the sweet-sharp of the syrup. It is pleasant, if less subtle, eaten chilled with cream or with yoghurt and dark brown sugar.

450 g / 1 lb Cox's Orange apples

225 g / ½ lb young rhubarb

4 tbsp granulated sugar

4 tbsp water

Rinse your apples, quarter and core them. Slice them, not too thinly, but do not peel. Cut the wiped rhubarb stalks into 6 cm / 2.5 inch lengths. Sprinkle the sugar over the rhubarb and let it stand for 2–3 hours, then add the water and the apple slices, and cook together very gently, turning the apples in the liquid until they are tender but not mushy. Serve in small bowls.





RHUBARB AND ANGELICA

Rosemary Hemphill's handbook of herbs and spices, which was a useful guide for cooks in the 1960s, recommended stewing rhubarb with angelica leaves. This may remind the reader of an earlier suggestion we noted that sweet cicely be employed. Garden angelica, a herb of Scandinavian origin, is botanically *Angelica archangelica*. Wild angelica, *Angelica sylvestris*, is not the same thing and should not be substituted. The plant was used for its stalks and (medicinally) its roots. It seems rather apt that rhubarb, a plant most favoured in the European north, should be linked with a Scandinavian herb.

500 g / 1 lb rhubarb
300 ml / ½ pint water
100 g / 4 oz sugar
4 young angelica leaves
2 thin curls of lemon peel

Cut the rhubarb into ¾ inch lengths and put it into a pan with water, sugar, angelica leaves and lemon peel. When it has come to the boil, simmer it until tender. Remove the angelica and lemon peel. Chill and serve with yoghurt or cream.

RHUBARB AND BANANA COMPOTE

Ursula Aylmer and Carolyn McCrum's interesting book *Oxford Food, an Anthology* collects recipes from the high tables and masters' lodgings of the university. This particular combination of fruits was served at St Edmund Hall, at the Principal's table. His wife had it from her great-great-grandmother as it was made at St Vigean's manse in Arbroath. Those Scottish ministers must have been gastronomic pioneers. Rhubarb itself was relatively new and although bananas were first mentioned in English printed material in the 1630s, the fruit itself was pretty uncommon until the late Victorian period. It was virtually





impossible to get the hands from their plantations to these benighted islands before they were black and fermenting.

450 g / 1 lb prepared rhubarb

75 g / 3 oz castor sugar

1 ripe banana

Wash the rhubarb and cut it into $\frac{3}{4}$ inch slices. Put it in a pan, sprinkle with sugar. Stand it for at least an hour to bring the juice out of the rhubarb. Cover it and bring it to the boil slowly and stir it gently once or twice. Turn it down and cook it gently for 2 minutes. Then turn off the heat and leave it on the stove for 5 minutes without lifting the lid, so that the rhubarb cooks but remains whole. While hot, slice the banana into the rhubarb, and serve it cold with pouring cream. If you chill it the banana will turn brown. A possible variation or injection of happy spice could be achieved by chopping up a piece of stem ginger and mixing it into the rhubarb.

RHUBARB COMPOTE WITH RED WINE

There are many ways to stew rhubarb. This gives a dark syrup through which the champagne-pink nuggets will shine. The rather good cookery book writer of the turn of the last century, Lucy H. Yates, had some wise words on the difference between compotes and stewed fruit in her delightful *The Gardener and the Cook* (1912): '[The compote], which keeps the full flavour of the fruit without losing its form or spoiling its appearance, is a method to be infinitely preferred. For this you must make your syrup first by boiling together sugar and water – not too much of either; the fruit to be cooked is wiped and put in, not too much at a time, and cooked until quite tender, but not long enough to break it, and after it is done the syrup is reduced by further boiling and poured over.'





300 ml / 10 fl oz red wine
110 g / 4 oz golden castor sugar
the zest from half an orange (no pith)
the zest from half a lemon (ditto)
450 g / 1 lb forced champagne rhubarb, cut into small chunks
pinch salt

Combine the wine, sugar and citrus zest. Bring to the boil and add the rhubarb and the salt. Cook very gently so that the rhubarb is tender but in no way mushy. Remove the fruit with a slotted spoon and reserve. Take out the peels and reduce the liquid by boiling by at least one half, adding back in any juice expressed by the rhubarb as you go. Pour over the rhubarb and chill.

ROTE GRÜTZE

The name translates as 'red groats' and was a standby of Schleswig-Holstein and other north German regions. In Denmark, it is called *rodgrød*. Essentially, it was a way of enlivening your groats (oatmeal) with the red berries of summer, most often raspberries and redcurrants. Over time, the starch element has changed: sago or tapioca are popular, semolina was the favoured vehicle of East Prussian (now Poland) *Rodegrütt*, and potato starch or cornflour were also favoured. It can be made with rhubarb and be eaten with lashings of cream or custard, or used as a sauce for cakes. There is little difference between this and the Russian, Polish and Slav dish called *kissel*.

275 g / 10 oz forced rhubarb, trimmed and cut short
140 g / 5 oz raspberries
600 ml / 1 pint water
225 g / 8 oz castor sugar
vanilla pod, scraped
5 tbsp cornflour slaked in 175 ml / 6 fl oz water





Cook the rhubarb in water until soft. Add the raspberries in the last minute or two. Press them through a fine sieve and add the sugar and the scraped vanilla seeds. Cook and reduce slightly for a few minutes. Slake the cornflour and stir into the boiling pulp, cook for a minute before pouring into a large serving dish. The amount of sugar will depend on your taste, but the intention is that the mixture should not be too sweet.

RHUBARB CHARLOTTE

This recipe was collected by Margaret Costa for a book called *Food for our Times*, an anthology of recipes donated to Oxfam, which was published in 1977.

175 g / 6 oz fresh white breadcrumbs
50 g / 2 oz melted butter
450 g / 1 lb rhubarb, cut into 1 cm / ½ inch slices
50 g / 2 oz brown sugar
½ tsp ground ginger
¼ tsp each cinnamon and nutmeg
2 tbsp golden syrup
1 tbsp lemon juice

Toast the breadcrumbs in melted butter. Fill a greased china soufflé dish with alternating layers of breadcrumbs and sliced rhubarb, finishing with a layer of crumbs. Each time you spread a layer of rhubarb, sprinkle it with some of the sugar and spice mixture.

Heat the golden syrup and lemon juice in 2 tbsp water, and pour over the charlotte. Put a butter paper or some such cover over the soufflé dish and bake in a preheated oven at 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6 for 30 minutes. Then remove the cover and bake for another 10 minutes until the top is crisp and golden.

Very tough, old rhubarb may be steamed as a preliminary.





RHUBARB AND GINGERBREAD SPONGE

This recipe comes courtesy of my friend Mavis Oddie in Timaru, on the South Island of New Zealand. It is partly the coincidence that New Zealand and Australia had their strongest British connection at the moment that rhubarb was enjoying its greatest popularity, and secondarily that rhubarb fared very well in New Zealand gardens, but the fruit has always enjoyed much favour in the Antipodes.

450 g / 1 lb rhubarb

150 g / 6 oz flour

a pinch each of salt,

cinnamon and nutmeg

1 tsp ground ginger

½ tsp mixed spice

100 g / 4 oz butter

50 g / 2 oz brown sugar

50 g / 2 oz golden syrup

1 egg, beaten

2 tbsp hot milk

½ tsp bicarbonate of soda

Cut the rhubarb into 2.5 cm / 1 inch pieces, and lay it in a well-greased baking dish. Sieve the flour, salt and spices together into a bowl. In a second bowl, cream the butter and sugar, then beat in the syrup. Mix well and add the beaten egg. Beat again and then fold in the dry ingredients. Lastly, stir in the hot milk with the baking soda dissolved in it. Pour this mixture over the rhubarb and bake in a preheated oven at 180°C/375°F/gas mark 5 for 35–40 minutes.



AMY'S CRUMB PIE

The delightful collection of recipes put together by Amanda Goodfellow and published by her as *A Household Legacy* in 1989 includes this 'family favourite' involving rhubarb. It certainly is enjoyable and has the advantage of being the quickest I know. I particularly like the way the unsweetened fruit contrasts with the sweet crunchy topping.

900 g / 2 lb rhubarb
ground cinnamon or grated lemon rind to taste
for the crumble topping
100 g / 4 oz butter or margarine
100 g / 4 oz plain flour
225 g / 8 oz soft brown sugar

Wipe and slice the rhubarb and put it into a greased pie dish. Strew it with the cinnamon or grated lemon. Make a coarse crumble by rubbing the butter into the flour and then mixing in the sugar. If you overwork the mixture, it will become sticky. Sprinkle it over the rhubarb evenly and pat it down lightly. Bake at 190°C/375°F/gas mark 5 for about 45 minutes, until the top is crisp and brown and the rhubarb oozing juice. Eat hot with yoghurt, crème fraîche or cream.



RHUBARB CRUMBLE

This recipe comes from the Shetland island of Fetlar. Aptly enough, the crumble is made with oatmeal. The source of the recipe, contributed to an island fund-raising cookery book, is a lady called Adeline.

An alternative crumble, suggested by Claire Macdonald of the Kinloch Lodge Hotel on Skye, whose cookery books have kept a generation of Scottish readers well fed, is made with crumbled digestive biscuits or gingernuts. She advises that you add cinnamon to the crumble mixture and improve the rhubarb with some orange juice.

An excellent improvement proposed by the chef Sean Hill, now cooking at the Walnut Tree near Abergavenny, is that you serve a ginger custard with your crumble.

450 g / 1 lb rhubarb
50 g / 2 oz granulated sugar
75 g / 3 oz butter or margarine
75 g / 3 oz demerara sugar
100 g / 4 oz porridge oats

Wipe the rhubarb and slice it into pieces 2.5 cm / 1 inch long. Place it in layers with the granulated sugar in a greased ovenproof dish. Melt the butter and mix it well with the demerara sugar and porridge oats. Cover the fruit with the crumble mix and cook for 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 for at least 30 minutes, until it is browned. Serve it hot or cold.





RHUBARB CLAFOUTIS

350 g / 12 oz rhubarb
300 ml / ½ pint milk, slightly warmed
25 g / 1 oz sugar
3 eggs
1 tsp vanilla extract
150 g / 6 oz plain flour
50 g / 2 oz extra sugar

Wipe the rhubarb and slice it into pieces 2.5 cm / 1 inch long. Blend together the milk, sugar, eggs, flour and vanilla until smooth. Pour some of this batter into a generous, greased pie-dish – just to cover the bottom with a 5 mm / ¼ inch layer. Preheat your oven to 180°C / 350°F/gas mark 4. Place the dish in the oven and bake the first layer of batter until it is just set. At this point, spread the rhubarb over the surface, sprinkle with the extra sugar and pour on the remaining batter mixture. Bake for between 35 and 45 minutes, until nicely browned, and dust with sugar before serving.

This is lovely as it comes from the oven, but even better with thick, unwhipped cream. ‘Delicious,’ says my daughter. ‘You can also make it in a single process, by first softening the rhubarb for 15 minutes in a buttered or oiled pie-dish, then pouring over the batter and sprinkling thickly with sugar. I cook it in a hot oven 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6 for more like 20 minutes – but I don’t think my pie dish is as deep as was used in the original recipe. My way looks messier, but is very light.’

An alternative treatment for the rhubarb suggested by the owners of the Burrastow Hotel on Shetland is that you macerate the rhubarb for about an hour with sugar and kirsch before putting it to the batter.





RHUBARB RUSSE

This recipe was offered by the *Fair Isle Times* on 15 June, 1984.

450 g / 1 lb rhubarb
50 g / 2 oz granulated sugar
2 egg yolks
50 g / 2 oz castor sugar
225 ml / 8 fl oz milk
12 g / ½ oz gelatine
18 sponge fingers
the grated rind and juice of 1 orange
150 ml / 5 fl oz pint double cream, whipped
1 orange, sliced

Wipe and slice the rhubarb. Mix with the granulated sugar in a saucepan over a gentle heat until the sugar dissolves. Simmer until the fruit is tender. Put through a food mill or otherwise purée. Cool and reserve.

Cream the yolks and the castor sugar until light-coloured and creamy. Stir in the milk. Cook in a bowl over pan of boiling water till thickened. Make sure the custard never boils itself.

Whisk the gelatine into the hot custard until it is completely dissolved, then cool.

Dip the sponge fingers in orange juice. Stand them around the sides of a 1.25 litre/2.25 pint buttered soufflé dish. Mix the rest of juice, the grated rind and the rhubarb purée into the custard.

Fold in the double cream; pour into the dish; and chill until set. Now, carefully trim the protruding tops of the sponge fingers.

If you want to serve it straight away, dip the dish into hot water to turn it out. Decorate with overlapping orange slices. You can freeze this charlotte, well wrapped of course, and for best results use within 2 months.





RUBY FRUIT SALAD

A friend living in Tokyo, Susan Ugawa, sent me this recipe. She advises using red-stemmed rhubarb. The salad usefully turns small quantities of fruit from your own garden into a stunning looking dish with a fresh flavour. If your children have grown the raspberries and strawberries, and there aren't enough to go round the family, this will make the most of them. It is also easy enough to be made by the children themselves, though the amount of fruit might diminish in the making.

350 g / 12 oz prepared rhubarb cut in 2 cm / ¾ inch lengths
100 g / 4 oz granulated sugar
225 g / 8 oz raspberries
225 g / 8 oz strawberries
3 tbsp water

Put the rhubarb in a saucepan with the sugar and water. Bring to the boil and simmer until barely tender, stirring continuously – this will take only a few minutes. Add the raspberries and cook for a further few minutes. Turn into a serving dish and add the strawberries when the cooked fruit becomes cooler. Chill well before serving with whipped cream.

Just before serving, a little whisky or brandy may be stirred in.

RHUBARB CRANACHAN

A fund-raising pamphlet for Sand Church was the source of this recipe. The parish church in the westside of Shetland is the smallest on the island. My daughter, who tested the instructions, put some of the sugar with the oatmeal or sesame and grilled them together. It can also be made with whipping cream and Greek yoghurt. A classic cranachan or cream-crowdie will take its sweetness from heather honey, and spice things up a little with whisky or Drambuie.





450 g / 1 lb rhubarb, wiped and cut into pieces
1–2 tbsp granulated sugar, to taste
50 g / 2 oz medium oatmeal or sesame seeds
300 ml / 10 fl oz double cream
150 ml / 5 fl oz fromage frais
25–50 g castor sugar

Stew the rhubarb, adding sugar to taste. Toast oatmeal or sesame seeds under a preheated grill until lightly browned. Whisk cream until it is holding its shape. Fold in the fromage frais, sugar and all but two tablespoons of the oatmeal or sesame seeds. Layer the rhubarb and cream mixture, then sprinkle over the remaining oatmeal or sesame seeds.

Sandsting Specials

RHUBARB MERINGUE

The idea of rhubarb meringue has been around for some time. May Byron had a recipe in her *Pudding Book* (1917) which entailed blind-baking a crust over an upside-down pie-plate then filling the cooled shell with fruit topped with meringue. It went like this:

Bake the crust on an inverted pie-plate. To prepare the filling, cut the rhubarb into inch lengths, put a layer into a saucepan, and sprinkle with sugar; add other layers of rhubarb and sugar, and cook till tender, using one cup of sugar to each pound of rhubarb. To each scant pint of cooked rhubarb add the juice of half a lemon and the well-beaten yolks of two eggs; pour the mixture into the baked crust, and set in the oven until the eggs have thickened the mixture. Spread a meringue made of the two whites of eggs over the top of the rhubarb, and brown delicately in the oven.





Lydia Strong, in a fund-raising cookery book for St Andrew's Church in Penrith, Cumbria (which has a most amazing eighteenth-century interior, designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor in 1720), made the following proposal for a rhubarb meringue without the pastry case.

*450 g / 1 lb rhubarb
the grated rind and the juice of an orange
2 eggs, separated
100 g / 4 oz sugar
35 g / 1½ oz cornflour*

Cut up the rhubarb and put it in a greased dish with the grated orange rind. Put the juice in a pot with enough water to make 15 fl oz. Mix 50 g / 2 oz sugar and cornflour, slake with the liquid and heat. Stir until thick. Let it cool. Add the beaten yolks. Pour this over the rhubarb. Preheat your oven to 170°C/325°F/gas mark 3 and bake for 20 minutes. Whisk the whites until stiff, then fold in the rest of the sugar. Spread over the rhubarb and continue to cook (for about 20 minutes) until the meringue has browned on its peaks.

St. Andrew's Recipe Book 2004

NANCY'S RHUBARB AND YOGHURT FOOL

This recipe is another from New Zealand. The authors estimate it will serve eight people.

*500 g / 1 lb prepared rhubarb
60 g / 2 oz castor sugar
200 ml / 7 fl oz plain yoghurt
300 ml / ½ pint double cream
dark chocolate or crystallized ginger*

Cut the rhubarb into small pieces and place in an oven-proof dish with 30 g / 1 oz of castor sugar and the butter and cook until tender. Purée in a blender.





Beat the yoghurt and cream with 30 g castor sugar until slightly thicker than the purée. Mix all together gently. Pour into dessert glasses and chill. Decorate with grated chocolate or finely chopped ginger.

‘A refreshing, simple but glamorous dessert.’

Mary Browne, Helen Leach and Nancy Titchbourne 1980

BURNT RHUBARB AND ORANGE CREAM

This recipe can be made with thick Greek yoghurt or with whipped cream. If the latter, less is required. I like to make this a day in advance. It does not separate out.

125 g / 4 oz rhubarb, wiped and chopped small

50 g / 2 oz granulated sugar

the grated rind and the juice of an orange

300 ml / 8 oz Greek yoghurt or 150 ml / 4 oz cream

muscovado sugar

Put the rhubarb and half the sugar in an oven-proof dish and sprinkle it with a dessertspoon of the orange juice; cover and cook in a lowish oven until tender. Cool and spoon off as much of the liquid that will have come out of the fruit to make up 50–75 ml when added to the remaining orange juice. Place the remaining sugar in a medium-sized saucepan, about 7 inches across, and heat it until it caramelizes. Immediately add about two-thirds of the liquid, stirring vigorously, and reduce it for about two minutes over a lowered heat. Watch for splashes and splatters. Cool this caramel and add the grated rind to it. Fold the rhubarb pulp and then the burnt orange gently into the yoghurt or whipped cream. Aim to distribute the pulp and the orange through the mixture without homogenizing it, so that it is instead streaky. Dish into four small bowls and sprinkle with muscovado sugar.



Something of the same idea, but different of course, can be found in a book by Caroline Waldegrave, Puff Fairclough and Janey Orr called *Leith's Easy Dinners*, a useful compendium from the cookery school of that name. Here the rhubarb is stewed with some orange peel and orange flower water, then shared between ramekins, topped with dark brown sugar and grated orange rind, and finished with Greek yoghurt and cream.

CAIRGEIN WITH RHUBARB

Cairgein is the Gaelic word for the seaweed known elsewhere as Irish moss or carrageen. I found the recipe in a publicity leaflet put out by a North Uist company, Hebridean Health Ltd. Carrageen has the ability to set food, much like agar-agar which comes from a related seaweed. It has often been favoured by vegetarians. The recipe does not give much idea of how to deal with the cairgein. It can be bought ready to cook in packs of about 25 g or 1 oz. First you soak it in cold water until it is soft, then simmer it in the water as in the recipe for about 20 minutes before straining it into the fruit purée.

500 g / 1 lb rhubarb, wiped and sliced
600 ml / 1 pint water
ginger or cloves
sugar and honey to taste
7 g / 2 tsp cairgein

Put the rhubarb in a small amount of the water and add flavourings such as cloves or ginger according to taste. Cook until broken down into a purée.

Simultaneously soak the cairgein in cold water. Then use the rest of the water to simmer it for 20 minutes. Strain it into the rhubarb. Mix thoroughly, and add sugar or honey according to taste. Put it in a mould that has been rinsed in cold water and chill until it is set (about 3 hours).





This use of seaweed to set a mould finds an echo in a vegetarian recipe book emanating from a holiday hotel or guest-house called Penlee in the South Devon village of Stoke Fleming that catered for the *bien pensant*, vegetarian and left-wing élite of Britain in the early years of the twentieth century. It is surprising how often the place crops up in the memoirs of old Labour politicians: sandals and short trousers by the seaside. The noted architect Clough Williams-Ellis (creator of Portmeirion) designed alterations to the house at Penlee.

1 ½ pounds of rhubarb, weighed after trimming
¾ pound of loaf sugar
half a lemon
½ ounce of agar-agar
1 gill of water
a little carmine [cochineal]

METHOD. – Wipe the rhubarb and cut it into pieces about ½ inch long. Put it in a Welbank or casserole with the grated lemon-rind, sugar, and half the water. Stew gently until tender, then rub through a fine wire sieve. Cut up the agar-agar and boil in the rest of the water. Strain it into the rhubarb-pulp, adding a few drops of carmine to colour. Rinse out the mould with cold water, pour in the rhubarb, and leave until it is cold. Serve with boiled custard.

Rhubarb makes a sensational jelly. Its delicately pink hues sparkle and glow in the soft light of the dinner table. It is possible to make the jelly clear by stewing champagne rhubarb and straining off the juice which can then be set with gelatine. Alternatively, a mould filled with the rhubarb pieces themselves can be set and turned out wobbling onto a dish. May Byron suggests you do it this way:





RHUBARB JELLY (PLAIN)

Cut one pound of rhubarb into inch-lengths, place in a baking-dish in alternate layers with sugar (one breakfastcupful will suffice). Add one cupful of cold water, the thinly peeled rind of one lemon, and a little syrup of preserved ginger or a small piece of root-ginger. Bake until the rhubarb is tender but not broken. Remove the rind and root. Soak one ounce of gelatine in half a cupful of cold water and stand this in hot water till it dissolves. Strain it into the rhubarb, add juice of one lemon, and pour into a wetted mould, a little at a time, letting [it] set a little before adding more, otherwise the rhubarb will all sink to the bottom.

RHUBARB JELLY (VERY CLEAR)

The Cookery Book of Lady Clark of Tillypronie, arranged and edited by Catherine Frances Frere and published in 1909, is a treasure-trove of late-Victorian kitchen lore and remarkably comprehensive in its range. Her recipe for a clear rhubarb jelly (not the fruit-filled one given above) is full of sound advice. The recipe was given to Lady Clark, the book records, by one Mrs Brinkler in 1883.

Do not spare the rhubarb as the juice only is used.

Stew the rhubarb in but little water, as it is in itself three parts water. Strain two or three times through a jelly-bag till the juice runs quite clear, and use 1 white of egg to clarify it. Add, for 1 qt. of jelly $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of sugar, and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ozs. of gelatine. If you want colour, add 3 drops of cochineal. If you bury the jelly in ice, use less gelatine. (1 oz. of gelatine *very much iced* is enough for a mould.)

You pour the jelly into a ring mould and put it on the ice, and you fill the hollow centre of the jelly before serving, with Chantilly cream flavoured with pounded vanilla.





(For stewed rhubarb, or for tarts, should the acid be objected to, first boil the rhubarb in water, and *throw that water away*; finish in fresh water, and do not sweeten the rhubarb till you use this second water.)

RHUBARB GINGER CRUNCH

In June 1984, *The Fair Isle Times* was waxing lyrical about rhubarb. I have already given you their lattice fruit tart, but two weeks later, the editor saw fit to print this proposal for rhubarb ginger crunch.

The name raises the vexed question of the precise identity of all these crunches, crumbles, cobblers, bettys and crisps (and if you are American, slumps, pandowdys and grunts for good measure). The crunch we're dealing with here reminds me of those 1950s cheesecake recipes that depended on a crust of crushed biscuits. In some respects, too, it is rather like a crumble pie with its top and bottom layers. Some crunches are not made with biscuit but rather with oatmeal.

For a handy shorthand, crumbles are topped with a crumbly pastry mixture and sometimes with oatmeal; cobblers are a fruit stew with dumplings made of biscuit dough; a crisp is pretty much like a crumble but made with a streusel dough (this the *Oxford Companion to Food* would claim to be the Central European original of the crumble topping, made with more sugar and less flour; crumbles, the *Companion* remarks, are a twentieth-century phenomenon). A betty is made up of layers of baked fruit and breadcrumbs; a crunch is a crumble with two layers of crumb (whether biscuit or oatmeal) sandwiching the fruit filling. Grunt, pandowdy and slump are American 'spoon pies': grunts are steamed; slumps can be steamed or baked. Pandowdys would appear to be a pie with a broken crust made from biscuit dough.





300 g / 10 oz gingernuts, crushed
100 g / 4 oz butter, melted
350 g / 12 oz rhubarb, prepared
100 g / 4 oz castor sugar
1 tbsp water
2 eggs, separated
200 g / 8 oz cream cheese
2 tbsp ginger jam
12 g / ½ oz gelatine dissolved in a tbsp hot water, cooled
150 ml / 5 fl oz double cream
1 piece stem ginger, sliced

Mix the biscuits and the butter. Press half of this mixture firmly into the base of a greased 10 cm / 8 inch loose-bottomed tin. Chill.

Gently heat the rhubarb, sugar and water until boiling. Simmer until syrupy. Purée. Cool. Beat the egg yolks, cream cheese and ginger jam until smooth; then add the rhubarb and the softened gelatine. Whip the double cream to a soft peak and fold into your mixture. Whisk the egg whites until stiff and fold these in. Pour all this on to the crumb base. Chill until set.

Sprinkle with the remaining crumbs, pressing them on lightly so as not to damage the filling. Remove the cake carefully from the tin. Decorate with stem ginger.

Fair Isle Times, 15 June 1984





RHUBARB FOOL (1)

This may perhaps be the first port of call to a rhubarb pudding-maker. It captures almost to perfection the evanescent flavour of the stalks, and imparts a creamy richness to their eating. It is also extremely simple.

500 g / 1 lb forced rhubarb, cut into short lengths
1 tbsp orange flower water
the grated rind of half an orange
60 g / 2 oz vanilla sugar
225 ml / 8 fl oz whipping cream

Cook the rhubarb with the orange flower water and the sugar over a low heat until tender. Drain and leave to cool. Whip the cream until stiff and fold in the fruit. Serve in glasses.

A bolder recipe, which is expressed merely in terms of ratios, can be used whatever the quantity of rhubarb you may have.

RHUBARB FOOL (2)

Wipe and trim the rhubarb. Cut into short lengths and weigh it. Add half its weight in castor sugar. Cook in a heavy-bottomed, covered pan, slowly. Put through the blender. Season with grated orange rind. Cool. Measure the resulting purée and add half its volume in Jersey cream. Whisk, but do not over whisk.

RHUBARB FOOL (3)

An almost identical recipe from the same household has a scantier proportion of sugar and rather more cream. These alternatives may be deployed at different times of the season, depending on the tartness or delicacy of the rhubarb.

In this one, clean and cut up rhubarb. Cook with 100 g / 4 oz sugar to each 450 g / 1 lb of rhubarb and a little





grated orange rind until tender. Do not add water. Put through the blender. Cool. Mix with an equal amount of double cream. Whisk till thick.

RHUBARB FLUMMERY

The original flummery (perhaps deriving from the Welsh word *llymru*) was a dish of oatmeal that had been long soaked in water and which was then cooked until almost solid. A sort of thick porridge. It was eaten with honey, and sometimes given a kick with wine or beer. In Georgian times, it changed, it was still fairly solid, but it was cream or ground almonds set with a calf's foot or hartshorn, a kind of blancmange. In America, the word continued in use longer than here in Britain and came to be a dish of fruit thickened with cornflour. The author May Byron, writing during the First World War, offered English housewives this flummery of rhubarb (using the term in an American way).

Cut up one pound of rhubarb, steam it till tender in a stone jar. Dissolve two ounces of gelatine in a little cold water, add this to the rhubarb with four tablespoonfuls of sugar. Mix all well and pass through a sieve. Pour into a lined pan with one teacupful of cream, and stir until the flummery heats through. It must not boil. Just before turning it into a glass dish, stir in one teaspoonful of essence of lemon. Let it grow cold before serving.



RHUBARB MOUSSE

This is a desperation pudding for people in isolated places. Neighbours are coming for dinner? Well, there is always rhubarb – but they have rhubarb in the garden too and you both keep hens. How to produce something different? The contents of the store cupboard have to be raided. I found the recipe as a contribution from Jene Pitaluga to *A Taste of the Falkland Islands*, a little book published in 1989. It's somehow comforting to think of rhubarb growing by the southern ocean as well as in the northern waters that lap the coasts of Shetland.

1 packet raspberry or blackcurrant jelly
300 ml / ½ pint boiling water
450 g / 1 lb cooked and sweetened rhubarb
150 ml / 5 fl oz double cream
2 egg whites stiffly beaten
Cream and chocolate curls to decorate

Dissolve the jelly in the boiling water and leave to cool. Add the cooked rhubarb to the cooled but not yet set jelly and blend it until the volume has increased. Turn into a bowl and stir in the cream. Fold in the beaten egg whites. Pour into a bowl or individual dishes and decorate when set with cream or chocolate curls to taste.