

Healthy Living Life

WWW.POST-TRIB.COM

12



STICKING TO A FOOD STAMP BUDGET

How well can a family of four eat on just \$68.88 a week? Planning, careful shopping are key to great meals. **E4**



REDUCE YOUR SALT INTAKE

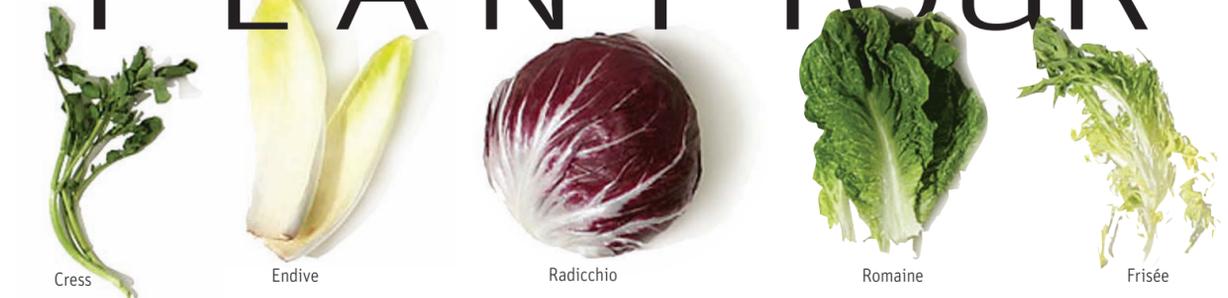
The average American consumes 3,000 to 5,000 mg of salt each day—here are some tips to minimize your daily usage. **E2**



FILE PHOTO



PLANT YOUR OWN LETTUCE



COMFORT FOOD
MARISSA RENWALD
mrenwald123@yahoo.com

Rhubarb cream cake, perfect for anytime

Even before the frost has completely crept off the buds of springtime and the morning ground is still hard beneath your feet, rhubarb, spring's first spawn of the season rears its bitter little head. And then, of course, it won't go into hibernation until well after the first frost of the autumn.

Lucky for us, rhubarb is as easy to cook with as it is to reproduce. Not only is this fruit delectable in sweets, but its tanginess adds a lovely quality to savory dishes, as well. But let's go back for a moment to rhubarb's divine dessert assets. The first thought that comes to mind is, of course, pie. Strawberry-rhubarb pie. Straight-up rhubarb pie. Rhubarb-peach pie. Rhubarb crisp. Even rhubarb crumble. But one of the greatest unsung heroes of rhubarb isn't a pie at all, but a cake.

Rhubarb cream cake is one of those recipes that has been reproduced again and again in ladies group cookbooks, church newsletters, and recipe exchanges. But really, it's no wonder: The flavor, the texture, the lip-smacking grandeur of it will make you relish each piece with an obscene gluttony.

The sheet cake is a vanilla cake, dense with the liquid from sugared rhubarb and pure cream—much like a tres leches cake. Atop the cake sits caramelized rhubarb pieces, soft and tender from the oven. But here's the best part: slice into the pan and you'll find a lovely pool of thick custard at the bottom of the cake, exhibiting the delicious tangy flavor of the rhubarb. With a scoop of vanilla ice cream, it is a cake to finish off a lovely dinner. With a tall glass of milk, it is the perfect midnight snack. Dunked in a hot cup of steaming coffee, it completes your breakfast in bed.

Yet, there is one somewhat astonishing secret to this sinfully delicious cake: it's surprisingly simple to make. A box cake mix serves as the batter, although a homemade recipe could definitely be substituted. Prepared in less than 10 minutes, this cake tastes as delicious and looks as elegant as a scratch recipe.

Rhubarb cream cake is one of those recipes that has been reproduced again and again in ladies group cookbooks, church newsletters, and recipe exchanges.

INSIDE E2

BY LEE REICH
For The Associated Press

With a little patch of garden space, you can do better than iceberg lettuce, the mainstay of restaurants and supermarkets. If you miss the deadline (now!), you do get one more chance this year; you can sow in late summer and fall for harvest during fall and winter.

Lettuce galore

Easier to grow and better-tasting (to many people) than iceberg lettuce are leaf lettuces, such as Black Seeded Simpson and Salad Bowl. If you harvest only the outer leaves, new leaves will keep growing from the center until summer heat finally turns them bitter. Boston-type lettuces like Buttercrunch, Bibb and Tom Thumb take a little longer to mature than leaf lettuces, but are well worth the wait for their loose heads of tender, buttery leaves.

If you like the crunch of iceberg lettuce, try growing Romaine (also called Cos) for torpedo-shaped heads of crunch and sweet flavor.

Lettuce comes in other varieties also. Some have leaves that are speckled red, some are hybrids of Romaine and Boston types, melding the crunch and sweetness of one with the butteriness of the other. Still others have leaves shaped like oak leaves, and some are frilly and green or red. They are as much fun to grow as to mix in a salad bowl.

Greens mid and piquant

One of my favorite greens goes under the names corn salad, feticcus, mache and lamb's lettuce. To me (not everyone seems to agree), the tender leaves have a mild taste that hints of rose petals. Another plus for this plant is that it is extremely cold-hardy. You can harvest a late

LAST CALL FOR PLANTING COOL-SEASON GREENS



summer planting long into fall and on into winter, and then continue early the following spring.

Another favorite, with a much shorter harvest season, is called erba stella. It's an edible species of plantain (that lawn weed!) with thin, crunchy leaves.

Not all greens have a mild taste. The spicy leaves of rocket, also known as rucola, or arugula, really wake up a salad. Leaf mustard is

another piquant choice.

The Japanese, known for their appreciation of the chrysanthemum flower, have developed a chrysanthemum with edible, spicy leaves, called shungiku greens.

For a green with a sour taste, which makes a good cold soup, there is also sorrel, or sourgrass. It is a perennial, so you need plant it but once.

Spinach is a standby of my spring and fall "greens" garden. As soon as weather turns warm in late spring, though, production ceases as seedstalks form. But spinach's relative, Swiss chard, keeps producing all summer and on into fall, and usually again the following spring.

Cabbage and its kin

The cabbage family gives us a slew of greens, many of which are cooked because of their coarse texture and robust flavor. These include turnip greens, which are quick-growing and produce turnip roots also, and kale, which bears all summer and is cold-hardy enough to be harvested from beneath winter snow. Chinese cabbages come in all sort of shapes and textures.

Even without a garden, the suburban or rural forager can pick something fresh for the salad bowl. Yellow flowers make dandelions easy to spot this time of year. Harvest the tender, toothed leaves (dent de lion is "lion's tooth," in French) at the base of the flower stalk. The French go so far as to plant dandelions in their vegetable gardens!

Spires of yellow flowers in meadows mark the wild cresses and mustards, which taste like their cultivated cousins.

When picking any wild greens, make sure they have not been sprayed. Be especially suspect of the few dandelions that might have sneaked into an otherwise perfectly manicured lawn.

All greens are rich in vitamins (especially A, C and E) and minerals (iron and calcium). Give them fertile soil, for they are at their best grown fast and succulent.

Shortcuts: The good, the bad and the ugly

BY MARIALISA CALTA
United Features Syndicate

When are cooking shortcuts too short? Every home cook has a line that she or he will not cross. I draw mine at using cream-of-anything soup as a shortcut to a cream sauce, processed cheese food and any so-called "home baked" goodie that comes in a tube in the dairy aisle. (Confession: Cracking the tubes open terrifies me.)

Sam Zien, aka "Sam the Cooking Guy," who has a cooking show on FitTV and at least two cookbooks under his belt, has his own standards. In his latest book, "Awesome Recipes & Kitchen Shortcuts" (Wiley, 2010), he interprets "shortcuts" to include gravy in jars, packaged Hollandaise, shelf-stable "ready" bacon and pizza dough from one of those scary tubes.

OK, I disagree. Why not just avoid recipes that call for gravy or Hollandaise if you don't have the time to make your own? And does it really take that much time to cook bacon? (To me, the "ready" stuff tastes weird.) And you don't have to make dough from scratch to have a top-quality pizza: Frozen dough from the supermarket or, even better, fresh dough from the local pizzeria is far preferable to the tube stuff.

Be that as it may, I'm on the same page with the Cooking Guy when it comes to frozen vegetables and frozen fruits. Sure, there's nothing better than ripe strawberries in season, but when they are out of season, we know that frozen berries taste way better than the cottony "fresh" ones available year-round. Frozen spinach adds vitamins (A and C), iron and taste to all

manner of pasta sauces, omelets and soups. Frozen peas are so far superior to canned peas that they seem like a different vegetable. Frozen peas are even preferable to fresh peas unless those fresh peas are recently picked and shucked. (As with corn, the sugar in peas quickly turns to starch.) If you are a gardener or have a farm stand or farmers' market nearby, go for it. If not, head for the frozen-food aisle.

No one argues that you should cook "from scratch" all the time. Many home cooks prefer a "half from scratch" method, which relies at least partially on healthy, quality prepared foods. What constitutes "healthy" and "quality"? Here are some of the Cooking Guy's recipes that pass my test.



Frozen peas are an excellent "shortcut" ingredient and make a delicious-tasting soup. Photograph by Steve Sanders and Josh Henry for "Awesome Recipes & Kitchen Shortcuts" by Sam Zien

INSIDE E2