

## GIVING THOUGHT TO RHUBARB!

By UCCE Master Food Preserver Laurie Lewis

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Many consider rhubarb an old-fashioned fruit, calling it the “pie plant.” However, rhubarb is a vegetable, belonging to the buckwheat family. This confusion began in 1947 when (through a legal decision) the USDA classified it as a fruit because the tariffs on bringing fruits into the country were lower than for vegetables.

Rhubarb makes a perfect perennial spring plant to grow in the foothills. It needs cold temperatures below 40 degrees F to produce stalks, but only grows when the temperatures average less than 75 degrees F. After patiently waiting two years for the plant and roots to establish, you can begin to harvest. One plant will provide enough for any family. This vegetable is rich in antioxidants, especially anthocyanins (which give the stalks its red color). It’s a bit overwhelming coming up with recipes to use the scores of rhubarb stalks one plant produces. So, let’s talk about a unique type of jam, the conserve, as one way to preserve rhubarb.

Conserves are a magical combination of dried and fresh fruits as well as nuts (but can also include vegetables and/or coconut), giving this sweet spread a variety of textures. They make excellent embellishments to a tray of meats and cheeses. Conserves raise desserts such as cakes, cheesecake, or that home-churned ice cream (perhaps with a slice of banana) to a “posh status” by adding a few spoonfuls on top just before serving. Consider making a batch and entering in the county fair this year! This recipe comes from *Ball Compete Book of Home Preserving*, 2020.

### **Spring Conserve**

Makes about seven 8-ounce jars

- 1 ½ cups canned crushed pineapple, including juice
- 1 ½ cups crushed hulled strawberries (fresh or thawed frozen)
- 1 ¼ cups finely chopped rhubarb
- ½ cup golden raisins
- Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 6 Tbsp pectin
- 6 ½ cups granulated sugar
- ½ cup chopped pecans

Prepare canner, jars, and lids. Sterilize jars for 10 minutes and keep hot.

In a large, deep stainless-steel saucepan, combine pineapple, strawberries, rhubarb, raisins, lemon zest, and lemon juice. Whisk in pectin until dissolved. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring frequently. Add sugar all at once and return to a full rolling boil, stirring constantly. Boil hard, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Stir in pecans. Remove from heat and skim.

Ladle hot conserve into hot jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe rim. Center lid on jar. Screw band down until resistance is met, then increase to fingertip tight.

If using a boiling water canner, place jars in canner, ensuring they are completely covered with one inch of water. Bring to a boil and process for 15 minutes\*. Remove canner lid. Wait 5 minutes, then remove jars.

If using an atmospheric steam canner, place jars on rack, place lid on canner, boil until a steady stream of steam is released from the vent hole, then process for 15 minutes\*. Wait 3-5 minutes before removing canner lid and jars.

Cool 12 to 24 hours, test for strong seal, remove rings, clean, label, and store jars.

\*The processing times given for processing the conserve are for processing at altitudes of less than 1000 feet. At 1001-3000, add 5 minutes; 3001-6000, add 10 minutes; 6001-8000, add 15 minutes; 8001-10000, add 20 minutes.

The UC Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County are a great resource for answers to your food safety and preserving questions. Leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at [edmp@ucanr.edu](mailto:edmp@ucanr.edu). For more information about our program, events and recipes, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmp>. Sign up to receive our eNewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpcsenews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!