

and sometimes decorated with a lattice top, which the same Hamilton editor described as “little twists of paste ... in bars.”

In *The Cook's True Friend* (Toronto, 1889), the compiler, Mrs James McDonald of Orangeville, included instructions for rhubarb pies baked in a deep pie plate and spiced with cinnamon. But in a copy of this book belonging to a friend of mine, a previous owner, Mrs D. McLean of Mono Mills, pencilled in her own version of rhubarb pie. She provides the unusual method of first blanching the rhubarb for a few minutes in boiling water, then draining and filling the pie. Over the fruit is poured a mixture of 1 egg, cinnamon, salt, 1½ cups of sugar, 2 tablespoons of butter, 1 tablespoon of water, and a heaping teaspoon of flour.

For Pie Plant Pie in *The Home Cook Book* (Toronto, 1877), each cup of stewed rhubarb is combined with 1 cup of sugar, 1 tablespoon of flour and 1 egg yolk, and flavoured with lemon; a meringue made of the leftover egg white “frosts” the top. Flavour options for pies increased in the twentieth century, from the still-familiar strawberry and rhubarb (*Midland Cook Book*, 1922) to the unusual raisin and rhubarb (Nellie Pattinson's *Canadian Cook Book*, Toronto, 1937).

Just as satisfying as rhubarb pies are puddings, such as Rhubarb, or Pie-Plant Pudding (recipe at right), from Grace Denison's *The New Cook Book* (Toronto, 1905), where the dessert is turned upside down to show the delightfully pink bottom layer of fruit. In the 1930s, domestic science students at Toronto's Central Technical School were taught by Miss Pattinson to make rhubarb ice and, in the same decade, the ladies of a social service club in the city served rhubarb punch at their spring parties (*The Wimodausis Club Cook Book*, 1934). Jellied salads became a staple of church suppers through the twentieth century and a friend reports that he has eaten a delicious rhubarb-and-beet jellied salad at the Women's Institute Hall in Newton Rob-  
inson, Ontario.

Before home freezers became common after 1950, preserving rhubarb enabled Southern Ontarians to enjoy it year round – as a relish to spice up meat or as many varieties of jam and marmalade. In her book, Grace Denison distinguished between green rhubarb jam made with green stalks and red rhubarb jam made with “the red kind.”

Rhubarb does not have much of a presence in today's grocery stores, despite (or perhaps because of) the vast array of products on the shelves. Don't let this discourage you from enjoying this traditional favourite, which is readily available at farmers' markets. Better still, plant a patch of rhubarb and embrace Ontario's food roots each spring!

### RHUBARB, OR PIE-PLANT PUDDING

Chop rhubarb pretty fine, put in a pudding-dish, and sprinkle sugar over it; make a batter of one cupful of sour milk, two eggs, a piece of butter the size of an egg, half a teaspoonful of Magic Soda and enough flour to make [a] batter about as thick as for cake. Spread it over the rhubarb, and bake till done. Turn out on a platter upside down, so that the rhubarb will be on top. Serve with sugar and cream.

From *The New Cook Book* by Grace Denison (Toronto, 1905).

### NOTES FOR THE MODERN COOK

For amounts use: 4 cups finely chopped rhubarb (¼- to ½-inch pieces); 1 cup sugar; 1 cup milk into which stir 1 teaspoon lemon juice or vinegar (which sours the milk); 2 eggs; 2 ounces butter, melted; ½ teaspoon baking soda stirred into 2 cups flour. Place rhubarb in 9-inch glass or ceramic pie plate (or similar casserole dish) and sprinkle with the sugar. Make a batter by first combining the sour milk, eggs, and melted butter, then stirring in the flour. Spread batter over fruit and bake at 350°F until knife comes out clean when inserted in cake top, about 50 to 55 minutes. Immediately turn out onto serving plate. Serve with thick cream or whipped cream.

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Shown here, “Spring Drink” and “Rhubarb, or Pie Plant Pudding.”

