

As the weather gets warmer, the menu gets lighter. But that doesn't mean no dessert. Actually, the spring and summer months, with their bountiful fruits, are perfect dessert weather.

Because of its widespread use in sweets, rhubarb which is also called pieplant is thought of as a fruit. Botanically, however, it is a vegetable, a member of the buckwheat family and a close relative of garden sorrel. Only the stalks of rhubarb, which look like big red celery, are eaten. The leaves, which contain oxalic acid, are toxic. Rhubarb has been around for about 4,000 years, but only as a food for the last few hundred. Native to Northern Asia, rhubarb was long prized for medicinal purposes.

The strawberry season perfectly coincides with the rhubarb season, and the two foods seem made for each other. With just a little extra sugar, strawberries give rhubarb the sweetness it needs.

A rhubarb-strawberry parfait is a perfect, light dessert for the last days of spring and first days of summer.

### **Rhubarb-Strawberry Parfaits**

1 pint strawberries, hulled and thickly sliced  
1/2 lb. fresh rhubarb, cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces  
1/4 cup water  
1/4 cup orange juice  
1/4 cup sugar  
1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise  
1 1/2 cups nonfat plain yogurt  
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract  
1 tsp. sugar, preferably superfine (optional)

Combine strawberries, rhubarb, water, orange juice, sugar and vanilla bean in a heavy, medium sauce pan. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until fruit is very soft, about 10 minutes. Put mixture in a bowl and refrigerate until cold, about 4 hours.

Mix yogurt and vanilla until well combined. Taste and, if desired, stir in superfine sugar. Chill until serving time.

To serve, layer yogurt mixture and strawberry-rhubarb mixture alternately into wineglasses or parfait glasses, ending with fruit. Parfaits can be prepared a few hours ahead and refrigerated.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 131 calories, less than 1 g. total fat (0 g. saturated fat), 30 g. carbohydrate, 5 g. protein, 3 g. dietary fiber, 54 mg. sodium.