

Food ideas: Rhubarb

We had overseas visitors for nine days in April, and had the pleasure of seeing the parish through their eyes. I have always thought that it is a remarkably varied and friendly parish, with lots of handsome green spaces. But I had forgotten some of its other attributes: "You can let your dog off the lead in the field and nobody tells you off", "People live in tents in the fields and they're not immediately kicked out", "People walk and cycle a lot, and look quite fit". I felt ridiculously proud.

I also marvelled at a little work of art that we saw cycling up to Woodstock: a seascape of sun, mermaid and sailboat knitted and woven into the metal fencing over a busy road. Somebody had taken the time to make a grey and unlovely bit of England a bit brighter.

The visitors – my sister and niece – are as into food as I am, and we had a rhubarb cook-off on our final evening together. Each of us chose a course (me starters, sister Silvia mains, niece Steph dessert), and cooked something for that course that involved rhubarb. Both sister and niece are seriously into computer research, so their dishes were meticulously planned and executed, while I went for the eccentric freestyle approach. Husband Tim was roped in as the judge. He appeared in a magnificent 'rhubarb judging' outfit of red Hawaiian shirt and red cardie, and wisely determined that everything was delicious. However he did put a ranking on things.

Delicious: Riki's *black bean and rhubarb soup*. Gently fry one chopped onion and two sticks of chopped rhubarb in olive oil, add two tins of black beans, a pint of stock, four squares of dark chocolate, and a teaspoon of chopped rosemary. Cook for about 10 minutes. Put through the blender, and warm again to serve.

Even more delicious: Silvia's (well, Martha Stewart's) *rhubarb relish with pork chops / cheese toast*. Gently cook 1 chopped onion, 2 cloves of garlic and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt in 1 tablespoon of olive oil for 5 minutes. Add a small glass of white wine, a handful of raisins, half a cupful of sugar, and four large sticks of chopped rhubarb. Bring to a gentle boil and simmer for about 7 minutes. Serve either with pork chops or with cheese on toast.

The most delicious: Steph's *rhubarb strawberry tart*. In a bowl, combine 12 oz. of finely chopped strawberries, $\frac{3}{4}$ pound finely chopped fresh rhubarb and a cupful of sugar. Set aside. Roll out store-bought shortcrust pastry into round pieces about 9 inches across and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick. Top each piece of pastry with several tablespoons of fruit mix, and fold the edges of the dough over the fruit, making pretty pleats. Bake at 200C for about 40 minutes until the pastry is brown. Serve with ice cream.