

Something Yorkshire

Rhubarb. Supposed to be very easy to grow out of doors where the leaves will be green and the flavour quite sharp, but still tasty and nourishing. I say easy as I killed the last crown I was given but the current plant is doing well, albeit slowly.

When the huge Becontree estate in Dagenham was built in the 1930s my late father was sent there from the East End to stay with a friend of my grandmother who had recently been moved to a new house as part of the slum clearance scheme. My father got a nice holiday in the fresh air and countryside (as Dagenham was then, relatively speaking, and enough distant from Bethnal Green to make it an adventure) and the friend got a helpful and trustworthy lad to help her move furniture. A railway line ran through the main street to transport materials to the construction sites; rhubarb grew wild along the tracks. One of dad's jobs was to pick enough for pies and crumbles.

Also the leaves (poisonous) were used to clean saucepans. The acid fetched them up nice and shiny. I think I'm one of the last people in England who remember their mother doing that. Which is why the death of my crown dismayed my friends, when the stuff grows elsewhere with such ease.

A type which doesn't grow wild is the delicate stalks of 'forced rhubarb' grown in the Rhubarb triangle in Yorkshire. The stalks grow straight, pink and the leaves stay yellow in the darkness. And very nice it is too.

As from this video I learnt that rhubarb is a vegetable, not a fruit – no pips.

So just as knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit and wisdom is not putting tomato in a fruit salad, wisdom is

serving stewed rhubarb with custard, not gravy.