

# A Year at Clove Brook Farm

GARDENING, TENDING FLOCKS, KEEPING BEES,  
COLLECTING ANTIQUES, AND ENTERTAINING FRIENDS



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Foreword by Martha Stewart

RIZZOLI  
NEW YORK

# MAY

It's showtime at Clove Brook, and the pace of the next couple of months is like running a marathon. The rewards of months of planning and preparation are finally starting to pay off as the garden springs to life, a result of warmer days and, hopefully, the April showers that encouraged things along. It's my hope that everything comes together as imagined in my head, although I don't take any of it for granted. The seedlings that I've nurtured in the garage are ready to be planted at the end of the month—and quickly! The chicks are also hatching now. And the peonies are starting to put on a spectacular show with their colorful blooms, as vivid as a fireworks display.

Most importantly, the race is on to procure unique and unusual plants at some of my favorite nurseries and plant fairs. Friends know that the third weekend of May is like Christmas to me, because it's the annual Trade Secrets event in nearby Litchfield County, Connecticut. For one day only, rare plants and garden furnishings are for sale at this lauded fair, while a second day is devoted to garden tours at nearby private estates. I've been attending for several years. At the last few, I've been at the front of the line for the early-bird shopping that starts at 8:00 A.M. This group of attendees is serious!

I often joke with friends that they cannot talk to me during those wee hours, as it's a sprint from one vendor to the next to make selections and purchases before someone else snaps up a treasure. Most of the furniture and accessories are one-of-a-kind vintage or antique pieces, so you can't be indecisive. Similarly, some exhibitors only have a few plants of a certain variety for sale. You might not see the likes of them again until the

**OPPOSITE:** My garage porch offers not only the perfect perch for relaxation, but also is the ideal spot for my collection of myrtle, cypress, and coleus topiaries. Sheltered from the harsh midday sun, which can stress them, they seem to thrive there atop the Victorian wire plant stand. The vintage rattan chaise and wicker chair belonged to my grandparents.



“The good man is the friend of all living things.”  
—Mahatma Gandhi

following year—if ever—and you probably won’t come across them at your neighborhood nursery. Over the years, I’ve developed some amazing relationships with growers from as far away as Maine who exhibit here, and I stay in touch with them throughout the year to know what they will be bringing for each fair. I love growing beautiful auriculas (also called auricula primroses), but the finicky alpine plants can also be difficult to source. At a Trade Secrets event several years ago, I met a nursery owner who specializes in them, and they now let me know in advance what varieties they’ll be selling.

May is also the time that I map out my herb beds at Clove Brook and get them planted accordingly; I prefer to start over each year as the flavor can change year to year in herbs that come back. It’s also the time to execute any sort of major (and minor) hedge, tree, or shrub planting, whether it’s to replace any specimens I lost over the winter or define a new garden area on the property. If the weather is agreeable, proper outdoor entertaining is on the calendar once again, and I love to create arrangements where my peonies can bask in their glory. May is a reminder that summer is just around the corner, and I plan on making the most of every second.

Antique concrete squirrel garden ornaments flank the entrance to the dovecote garden. Their winsome demeanors add a touch of whimsy and offer a cheerful welcome.



## PEONY LUNCHEON

**My love for peonies** is unwavering, so much so that I've immortalized them in a series of hand-thrown plates I designed that feature ones I've grown at Clove Brook Farm. Together with my studio team, I photograph the blooms in a small white-box studio in the grange hall on my property.



They are then put on a ceramic transfer, which is like a decal or tattoo, and applied to the plates. These plates are fired at a much lower temperature than other ceramics. We played with the scale for a long time and ended up with a look that we like and that customers responded to with enthusiasm. The success of those plates has, in turn, inspired the creation of two additional sets of flower plates: the aforementioned peonies, plus a sweet pea and dahlia collection.

For this gracious Saturday lunch in my field, I surrounded the table with vintage chairs from my great-grandparents' house along the Canadian shore of Lake Erie. Covering the table was a new tablecloth that features a classic Tillett Textiles print favored by Bunny Mellon

and Billy Baldwin. I happened upon forty never-used napkins in this same Tillett pattern at an auction of Mellon's home furnishings, and a friend gifted me the matching tablecloth. I sent most of the napkins to friends but kept a few for myself. I love the juxtaposition of the pale blue Leontine Linens napkins with the bold red monogram in a block script set against the flowery tablecloth.

The real joy of this table, besides the ebullient peony blooms, comes from the assortment of petite accents. The silver shovels and salt spoons may not be one-of-a-kind pieces, but they are certainly conversation starters, just as the frogs and ladybug ornaments inspire delight and add a touch of whimsy that often seems to be missing from contemporary tablescapes. There are also objects that I search for more actively. I have thousands of napkins and a small army of place mats, but it's not a stellar bounty. You could say that I'm napkin rich and place-mat poor! I love the contrast and juxtaposition of mixing and matching linens, but it takes patience to build a collection.

**ABOVE:** The rich crimson color of a 'Cherry Charm' peony is always a standout in the garden. **OPPOSITE:** For a luncheon on the lawn, I selected one of my favorite tablecloths that I had custom printed by Tillett Textiles in Sheffield, Massachusetts. The butterfly and floral pattern was a favorite of gardener and philanthropist Bunny Mellon. The chairs belonged to my great-grandparents and came from their home along the shores of Lake Erie. **FOLLOWING PAGES:** A bounty of peonies, lilacs, and viburnums rest in faux-bois cachepots of my own design. **PAGES 48-49:** The vase of baby chicks is a temporary gesture and they are returned to the brooder when the meal begins.









'SEIDAI' TREE

'ABALONE PEARL'

'BUCKEYE BELLE'

'BURMA JOY'

'SOFT SALMON JOY'

'CORAL SUNSET'

'CORAL CHARM'

'LAVENDER WHISPER'

'LIEBCHEN'

'MAGENTA GEM'

'CYTHEREA'

'MORNING LILAC' ITOH

'FIRST ARRIVAL' ITOH

'MARTHA'

'CLOWN'

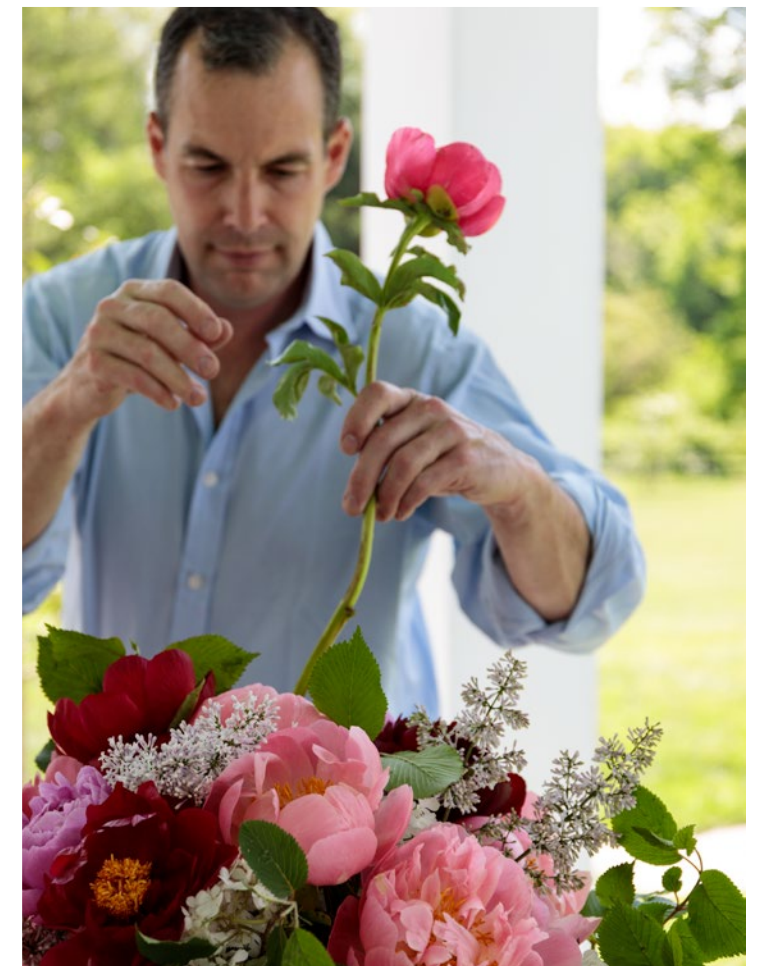
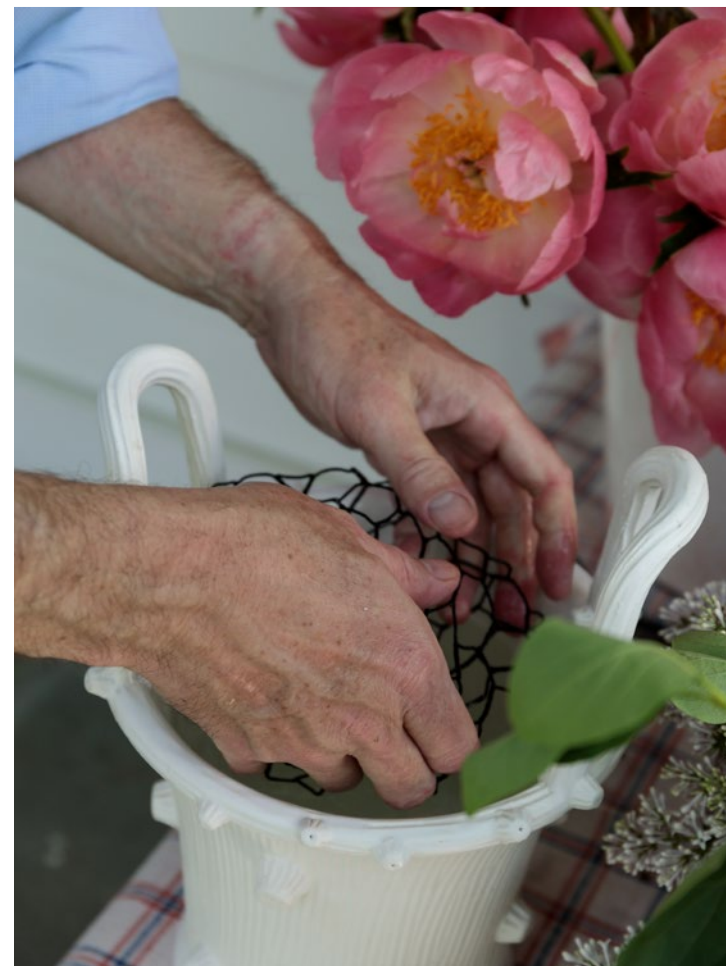
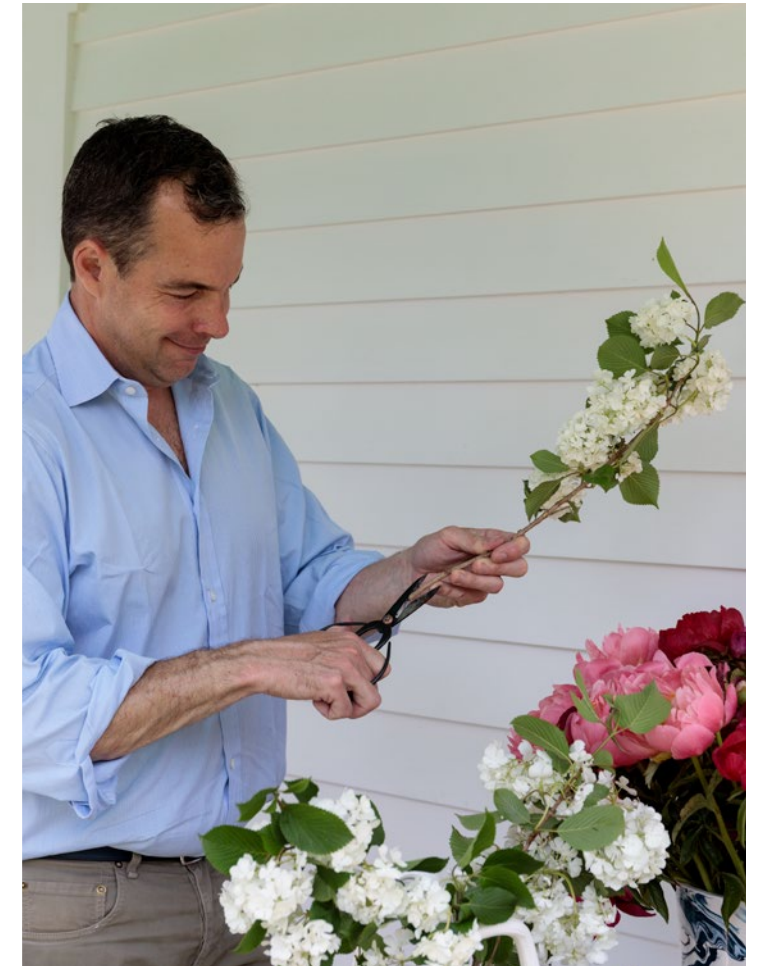
'FESTIVA MAXIMA'

'ATHENA'

'FAIRVIEW'



**THIS PAGE:** To prolong peony blooms, I condition them by removing most of their leaves except what's closest to the flower. I also keep them in a cool spot out of direct sunlight. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** A sharp pair of steel garden scissors are ideal for cutting small branches and removing excess leaves. 'Newport' viburnum is a perfect complement to peonies. I cut each stem at an angle so it can absorb the most water. A reusable ball of coated chicken wire anchors the arrangement.







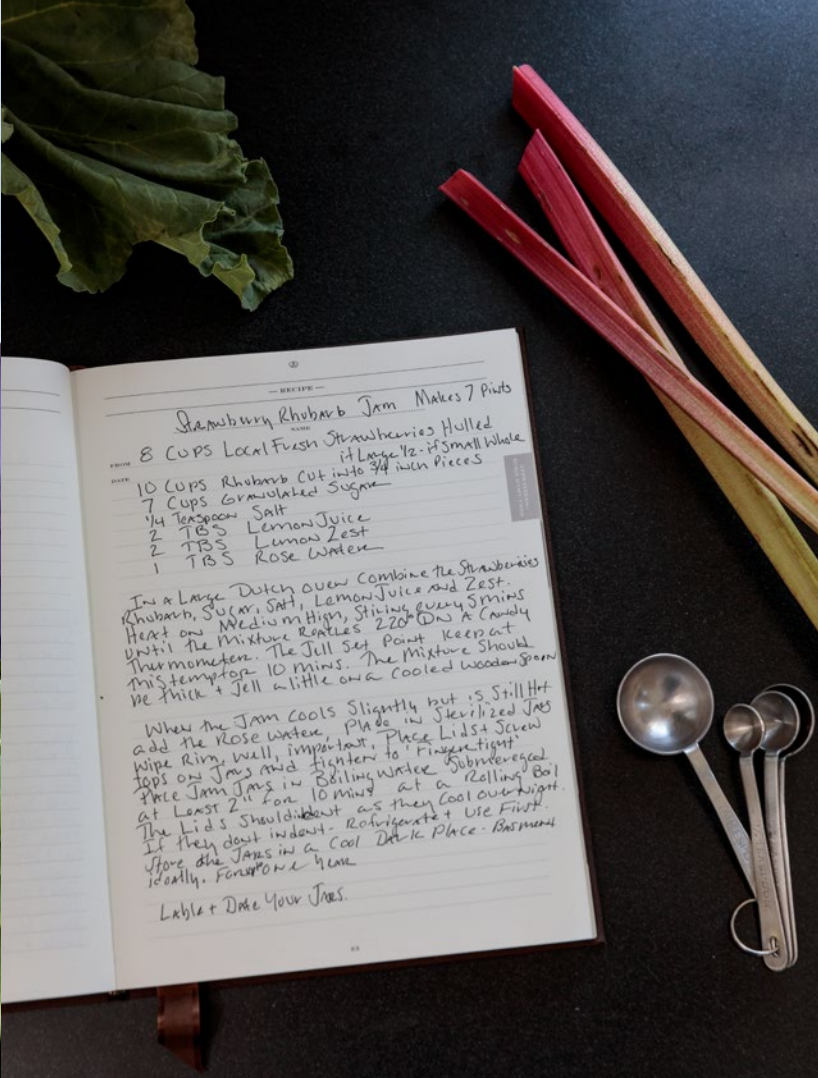
## BABY CHICKS

**In late May and early June,** I usually welcome a few dozen baby chicks to Clove Brook. Their sweet chirps add a joyful noise to the farm, and because I raised chickens when I was young, the annual hatching is a really meaningful event that brings me fond recollections of my childhood. The chicks have been hatched from eggs that I collected from my hens back in February and are kept in a brooder in the grange hall for the first few weeks of their development. Breed standards dictate what is considered a “perfect” bird, such as its size, body shape, and even the number of points on its crown. I primarily breed Buff Orpingtons for their even temperament and proficient egg-laying capabilities, but also Araucanas for their beautiful pale blue and green eggs.



I hatch about thirty chickens a season, but before we can touch their soft feathers, the eggs are kept in an incubator for twenty-one days at a constant 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit for development. An automatic roller turns them every hour to help them develop. Once they’ve hatched, they are first moved to a large empty aquarium where I can keep an eye on them from all sides; a heat lamp overhead protects them from cold drafts. After a couple of weeks, they’re moved to a bigger brooder for more space, and that usually promotes the growth of healthier chickens that also grow faster than those kept confined to tight areas. I enjoy their peeps and chirps indoors as long as I can, and after six to eight weeks they’re moved into a safe area in the barn with chickens of similar size and temperament.

**OPPOSITE:** Buff Orpingtons are a nineteenth-century winter-hardy breed known for their docile temperaments, large stature, and proficient egg production. They are stately birds recognized by their fluffy feathers, which are soon evident after they’ve hatched. **ABOVE:** In their brooder—a repurposed aquarium lined with paper towels—week-old Buff Orpingtons find their traction.



## RHUBARB



I love rhubarb, and I love to combine it with other ingredients. From the moment rhubarb begins to burst from the garden, it gives and gives and can be harvested until the end of the season. This time of year, locally grown strawberries are at their peak—so naturally sweet that they don't need sugar—and they become available just as the rhubarb is ready for harvest. One of my favorite recipes is a simple strawberry-rhubarb jam that is a time-tested crowd favorite. It's great to serve guests, and it also makes for a lovely hostess gift when presented in pretty jars.

Rhubarb can be either red or green in color, and the flavor is equally good in both. And

while the stalk is delicious, the plant's foliage is toxic to humans and should be avoided. With its striking color and unique tart flavor, rhubarb is my go-to for a variety of dishes, syrups, sauces, and purees. Besides the jam I make, rhubarb is perfect for pies and crisps and great in fizzy drinks and cocktails.

If you have a friend who can propagate rhubarb for you from an established plant—which is as easy as dividing a crown with a bud—that's an ideal way to jump-start your own crop the same year. Otherwise, a small planting from a nursery can take a good three years to produce any yield. But don't fret: your patience is worth the future payoff.

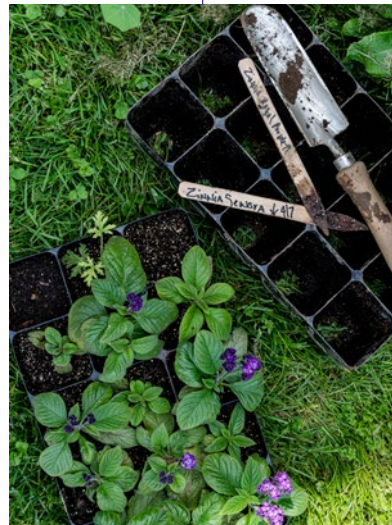
**OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Rhubarb's striking, colorful stalks. My handwritten recipe for making rhubarb-and-strawberry jam. Jars ready to be sealed. The plant's rich colors and texture make it both a visual and a tasty treat. **ABOVE:** Rhubarb, fresh from the garden.

**FOLLOWING PAGES:** Ingredients for my rhubarb crisp, including brown sugar, butter, and oats for the crumble topping, are mise en place, making preparation easy with everything at hand.



## DIGGING AND PLANTING

It may seem surprising that of the many eye-catching gestures I have created in the garden, all of them can be attributed to the help of just a few simple, basic, and widely available tools. First, I would be lost without the thousands of wooden stakes that I buy to label all of my plantings—those I can see, of course—but especially those bulbs, tubers, and seeds that are dormant for long periods before sprouting. Not only do I label the type of plant, I often note its color, particularly if there are multiple varieties. As much as I'd like to think I can remember what has been planted where, one can easily lose track once the pots they came in have been discarded and the seeds in the ground have been covered with dirt. I always use bamboo rods or wooden stakes and jute twine, all of which are biodegradable.



A variety of trowels proves to be indispensable, as each one serves a different purpose—the pointy ones are perfect for planting seedlings and working in rocky soil; the wide ones are ideal for planting bulbs. Supersharpened clippers from Japan are kept handy for pruning small, low-hanging branches, and as much as I like to get my hands in the dirt, a good pair of gloves keeps me safe from cuts and splinters. I buy multiple pairs

of inexpensive, good-quality gloves that can be thrown in the washer and air-dried and kept around the various parts of the property—on the terrace, near the dovecote, in the garage, and at the pool house. Because the gardens at Clove Brook are so spread out, I like to know that there's always a clean, dry pair nearby and ready at a moment's notice.

**ABOVE:** Basil seedlings await planting with a slim trowel. The plants have tender roots and will succumb to late spring cold snaps and should be planted well after any signs of frost in the forecast. **OPPOSITE:** Wide trowels with curved sides are ideal for shoveling, scooping, and weeding. Trowels with long, thin blades and a pointed tip aid in transplanting. Small, scissorlike clippers are used for snipping rosebuds or poppy blooms. For heavy pruning, a pair of hand shears with a large blade can cut through thick branches. Clippers with long blades are helpful for shaping large swaths of shrubs, such as lilacs. Wooden plant labels, bamboo stakes, and jute twine are all biodegradable, and rubber gloves get washed and reused regularly.





**ABOVE:** Once the tulips have finished blooming, the second planting of the season takes place in the dovecote garden. Kale, zinnia, and nasturtium plants were all started from seed. **OPPOSITE:** After the spent tulips and their bulbs have been removed, the soil must be tilled and loosened for the next succession of plantings. The sweet peas have already started climbing the crisscross wattle fencing and will cover it by June.



## SPRING CALENDAR

### MARCH

Plant bare-root roses and sweet peas in the garden. Fertilize roses every month through July.

Start annual seeds indoors under grow lights.

Turn the compost pile, which should be done once a month.

Prepare incubator for chicks one week before setting eggs. First chickens begin to hatch.

Move tropical plants outside during warm daylight hours.

Plan herb-garden layout.

Spread compost and fertilizer over dovecote garden.

Create large flower arrangements with apple blossoms and lilac branches.

Photograph the garden every month. Print and date the pictures for future reference.

### APRIL

Plant dahlia tubers.

Trim back any deadwood on roses. Prune thoroughly—the plants thrive on new growth.

Sow seeds of cold-hardy vegetables and flowers—such as lettuces, snap peas, zinnias, and nasturtiums—outdoors.

Bring lawn furniture outdoors from winter storage.



Shop for both new and vintage outdoor furnishings and accessories. I love the surprises I find at the New York Botanical Garden's Antique Garden Furniture Fair.

Two weeks before the holiday, order a ham for Easter brunch.

Remove winter storm windows and install screens.

Plant fruit trees.

Remove sod in preparation for any new garden spaces, and relocate grass to areas with spotty coverage.

Spread a generous layer of mulch on flower beds to avoid laborious weeding later.

### MAY

Uncover the pool on May 1.

Order next year's tulip bulbs while this year's are blooming.

Mid-month, start planting the flower beds, being careful not to overcrowd. Even with six-inch spacing between each, plants will fill in quickly.

Attend local plant sales. Trade Secrets is always top of my list.

Visit your favorite garden centers and make time to discover new ones.

Make rhubarb pies and jams.

Harvest the last asparagus by mid-May.

### GIFT OF THE SEASON

Every season, I have a go-to item for gift giving from the farm. In the spring, my homemade strawberry-rhubarb jam is the perfect accompaniment to morning toast and buttery scones.



## SPRING RECIPES

### RHUBARB PIE

*I was given this recipe by my friend John Rosselli, but I think I improved it by adding more topping—just don't tell him!*

#### FOR THE PIE:

- 1 pie crust, homemade or store-bought
- 4 cups chopped fresh rhubarb or frozen rhubarb, thawed
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- Juice of half a lemon
- 3 Tbsp. all-purpose flour

#### FOR THE TOPPING:

- 4 cups Smart Start or Corn Flakes cereal
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$  stick salted butter (4 Tbsp.), at room temperature
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Roll out pie crust, place in a 9-inch round glass pie plate, and refrigerate until dough is firm.
3. Cut rhubarb into  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pieces and toss with sugar, cinnamon, lemon juice, and flour. Put mixture in chilled pie crust.
4. Prepare ingredients for topping. Crush cereal in a medium mixing bowl, then add the cinnamon, butter, and brown sugar. Mix with your fingers until you have a rough crumble.
5. Spread topping evenly over pie filling, cover with aluminum foil, and bake for 45 minutes. Uncover and bake 15 more minutes, or until crumble is golden and filling is bubbling.
6. Serve hot, warm, or room temperature with vanilla ice cream.



### COLD-BREW BLACK TEA WITH FRESH MINT

*I like to see the stems of mint protruding above the top of the pitcher—it just looks festive.*

- 4 pints cold or room-temperature water
- 1 large black tea bag, preferably Luzianne
- 1 bunch fresh mint

1. Fill a pitcher with water.
2. Place tea bag in pitcher along with bunch of fresh mint. Steep tea for approximately 30 minutes.
3. Serve over ice.

### COLD-BREW GREEN TEA WITH MINT, LEMON BALM, OR LEMON VERBENA

- 4 pints cold or room-temperature water
- 3 green tea bags, preferably Tazo
- 1 bunch fresh herbs of your choice

Follow directions for black tea above.

### LEMON VERBENA TEA

*No caffeine, no calories, refreshing, and great for digestion and relaxation. The process below also works really well with fresh mint.*

- 1 large bunch fresh lemon verbena
- Large heatproof pitcher or glass carafe

1. Place bouquet of lemon verbena in pitcher.
2. Pour boiling water over bundle, and let steep until cool. Serve over ice.

