



2023 NEWSLETTER

# EARTH ALMANAC



OUR SPONSORS:



SHARING COMMON GROUND, CULTIVATING CONNECTION

1603 N RIVERFRONT DR  
MANKATO, MN 56001



# THE PATH WILL EMERGE

BY LAURA MARSALA PETERSON, LEC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



There's a picture hanging in the Living Earth Center with the words "The Path Will Emerge" written on the top. Our Finance Manager, Melissa Martensen, got it when news came that the School Sisters would be leaving Good Counsel Hill, and we likely would have to find another location.

I've looked at the picture throughout this last year as a reminder to let pathways present themselves - a meditation on

letting go and seeing the future with open curiosity rather than worry. The idea that even when a destination isn't clear, to keep going, one step at a time, has helped frame faith differently for me. Even in the most uncertain of times, pathways are always there if we just are willing to trust the process.

Pathways are emerging all around for Living Earth Center. Some have led us off the Hill to different areas of Mankato, to new office spaces, growing spaces, and potential new homes for the Community Garden.

I love to think that Living Earth Center is creating pathways for people as well - for those facing food insecurity, we provide pathways for healthy food options; for those wanting land access, we provide pathways to justice by connecting people to land; for those wanting climate justice, we provide pathways to action; for those wishing to connect in more profound ways with their community, Living Earth Center provides ways that people can engage.

I believe this interconnected system of pathways is the catalyst for healthy change. This change is within our local community and also the more extensive systems at play. Together with each little step, the pathways of a better tomorrow are emerging, and on them we too are emerging as stronger individuals and collective communities.

As Living Earth Center's path continues to reveal itself, I hope you will continue to help illuminate it. I hope you will continue to provide the support needed to lay the next solid steps as we trailblaze these new paths forward.

As I look at where we've come from, it's been a beautiful road.



"The Path Will Emerge" by sisters Sonya and Nina Montenegro, owners and creators of The Far Woods. They seek to contribute to a great Culture Shift in which there is a land ethic, a reverence for nature, a rejection of the dominant throw-away mentality, and direct connection to where our food and the things we use come from. Their work can be found at [www.thefarwoods.com](http://www.thefarwoods.com)

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- Meetings scheduled for the 2nd Monday of every other month
- Next Meeting: September 11
- Welcome to new members: Yvonne Cariveau, Amanda Quam, Josh Reinitz, and S. Kathleen Storms
- Thank you to members whose terms have ended during the past year: Martin Jacaruso, S. Anna Marie Reha, and Mary Voight



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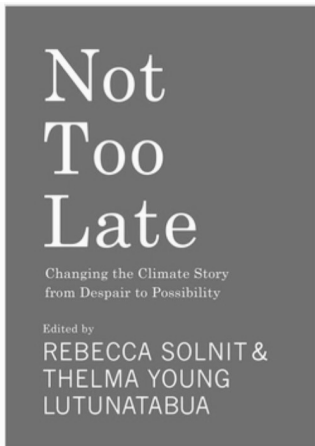
# BOOK REVIEW: NOT TOO LATE

BY MELISSA MARTENSEN, LEC FINANCE MANAGER

I will admit that I sometimes find myself despairing, overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of the climate crisis. When I began reading *Not Too Late: Changing the Climate Story from Despair to Possibility* I felt validated and then inspired. In this series of essays, written by activists, artists, poets, and scientists, no one shies away from the stark realities of our current situation, but also, no one gives over to their despair. The theme running through *Not Too Late* is that no one has to do this alone and that we are stronger together.

In her piece *Packing (and Unpacking) for an Emergency*, climate and human rights activist Rebecca Solnit says, “We is a crucial word. Two intertwined themes run through all the pieces in this book. One is love, and the other is community. Individualism can seem like an invitation to travel light, but it often keeps you from getting anywhere at all. It strands you on your own. One response to climate says all we can take care of is our own feelings or ourselves, but it’s the connections – to places, people, movements, ideals – that fortify us to face the situation and make it possible to change that situation.”

The United States has an obsession with individualism, and it has hindered our ability to act on climate change. In her essay, *Shared Solutions Are Our Greatest Hope and Strength*, community organizer Gloria Walton says, “Capitalistic values have promoted individualistic mindsets and made us believe our resources are finite and



competitive. But that doesn’t have to be our reality. We have the power to tap into abundance and collaboration. It’s our collective responsibility to envision and create the world we want together. We need bold, sustainable solutions that benefit many, not just the few.”

Throughout the many essays it is made clear to the reader that when we set out to create this new world, we do not have to have all the answers before we begin. In *What*

*to Do When the World Is Ending*,” organizer and writer Yotam Marom says, “As we look out on the political landscape before us, we have every right to assess it as bleak. But nothing is inevitable, and we shouldn’t expect our tiny human brains to know how everything will unfold... Rather than pretend we know how it all ends, we should do the things we know have worked before: nurture and join powerful social movements, and build institutions that provide masses of people with a vehicle for belonging, meaning, and long-term struggle.”

This is echoed by climate justice writer Mary Annaise Helger in her essay, *Here’s Where You Come In*. She writes, “The answer [to the question, “What can I do?”] actually emerges as quite simple: do what you’re good at. And do your best... Join something bigger than yourself because

this is so much bigger than any of us alone. It’s about all of us, together.”

*Not Too Late* does a good job of reminding the reader that we are not alone – not in our despair, not in our desire to make changes. It makes it clear that we have hard work ahead of us and that we are at a point in time where we cannot wait. But it also reminds us that there are already many people doing this work on the frontlines, and we need to follow their lead. In *Defeating the Fossil-Fuel Industry*, journalist Antonia Jubasz says, “Increasingly, people came to look to those who had the longest experience confronting the fossil-fuel industry. Those

were primarily marginalized communities, communities of color, nations of color, who have been since the beginning on the front lines of fighting fossil-fuel extraction, who were the most immediately harmed by climate change, and who have always been resisting the industry. What if all of those strategies that were already being utilized and practiced were supported, elevated and echoed?”

*Not Too Late* reminds the reader that together we have the strength to enact change on a major scale, this work is already being done, and it is up to us readers to join in the good fight. Included in the book is a quote from author Octavia Butler, “We don’t have to wait for anything at all. What we have to do is start.” *Not Too Late* provides a blueprint to do just that.



“We Have the Solutions”

Illustration from *Not Too Late* by arts organizer, puppeteer, artist, and carpenter, David Solnit.

## JOIN THE FUN - VOLUNTEER WITH LEC!

Want to get involved with Living Earth Center?!? We would love to have you join our vibrant and dedicated team of volunteers! We have many opportunities to fit your interests/area of expertise.

- Want to work outside? Volunteer at the Farm!
- Want to help plan and coordinate events/classes/workshops? Join our Events Committee or Earth Conference Task Force!
- Have interest or experience in fundraising? Join our Development Committee!
- Want to take photographs at events or write articles for our monthly e-newsletter? Join our Communications Team!

Visit our website [www.livingearthcentermn.org](http://www.livingearthcentermn.org) or contact [info@livingearthcentermn.org](mailto:info@livingearthcentermn.org) for more information and volunteer opportunities.





# SAVE THE DATE

For a full listing of LEC classes, events, workshops, and registration details, please visit our event calendar at: [www.livingearthcentermn.org/news-events/event-calendar.html](http://www.livingearthcentermn.org/news-events/event-calendar.html)

**OPEN MIC NIGHT**  
 Sunday, August 27 and  
 September 24 at 7pm

*in the Garden*

**18TH ANNUAL EARTH CONFERENCE**

**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE:**  
 OUR COLLECTIVE ROLE IN RECONNECTING  
 PEOPLE, PLACE, AND ECOLOGICAL  
 RELATIONSHIPS

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2023**

**CREATING COMMON GROUND**

OCTOBER 17TH



PICKLING

AND



PICKLE BALL

6 - 7:30 PM AT LOCALE BREWING CO

**WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION**

**DEC. 21ST**

# GIVE TO GROW MANKATO

Funds raised during our 2023 Give to Grow Mankato Campaign will go to support our Community Food Connection Program.

Through this program we directly connect people to the land and to healthy, organic produce. A 2019 study found that 1 out of every 6 Blue Earth County residents were low-income and had limited access to healthy foods. We work with our Community Partners to create pathways to food and land access and agency over food choices.

Donations in any amount will make a difference in your community.

As we grow to meet community need, our expenses are growing as well. If you donated last year, we encourage you to increase your 2023 donation amount. We also encourage you to become a monthly donor - a donation of \$5/month gives a total of \$60 to the campaign.

If you are interested in becoming a legacy sponsor by putting LEC in your estate plan, please contact our Executive Director Laura Marsala Peterson at [lpeterson@livingearthcentermn.org](mailto:lpeterson@livingearthcentermn.org).

Living Earth Center Community Food Connection Program Includes:

- **Youth Gardening Initiative** - Includes weekly classes with over 70 MY Place youth ages pre-K to teens.
- **Produce Donation** - Last year over 2400 lbs of fresh, organic produce was donated to community partners like ECHO Food Shelf, and FOCP Summer Food Program.
- **Emerging Growers** - In its second year, we are expanding the number of participants and working to create pathways for the growers to enter the local food economy.
- **Community Garden Partnerships** - Our flagship partnership with MNSU School of Allied Health and Nursing running the dementia-friendly Eng-AGE-ment Garden, is in its 5th year!
- **Community Garden Scholarships** - Annually LEC provides an average of 12 scholarships, insuring that anyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, has access to land to grow food for themselves and their families.

**HELP SUSTAIN SUSTAINABILITY!**  
 Become a sustaining monthly donor: a convenient, budgeting-friendly way to make a lasting commitment to LEC's mission



## DONATION PLEDGE CARD RETURN TODAY!

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

LIVING EARTH CENTER  
 1603 N RIVERFRONT DR  
 MANKATO, MN 56001

DONATIONS MAY ALSO BE MADE ONLINE:

[www.livingearthcentermn.org](http://www.livingearthcentermn.org)

YES! I WANT TO SUPPORT LEC AND GIVE TO GROW MANKATO!

- \$1000    \$500    \$250  
 \$100    \$50    \$25  
 other \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Make this a monthly donation



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_



# TIME, TALENT, AND TREASURE: THANK YOU

LEC could not operate without the donations of time, talent, and treasure from such a vibrant and generous community of supporters.

Our sincerest thanks to each and every one of you.

## Sustaining Donors

Kay & Jim Ackil  
Becky Bates  
William Broussard  
Jolly & Chris Corley  
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Svetlana Amende  
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Mymique Baxter  
Sara Biocic  
Robin Boeke  
Victoria Burt-Heun  
Melissa Enter  
Bruno Gad  
Skadi Garlick  
Sandra Gibbs  
Thomas Hager  
Ann Carol Kaufenberg  
Edith Kimathi  
Deborah Kirby  
Doug Kruckeberg  
David Lamson  
Sue Larsen  
Brianna Larson  
Scott Leonard  
John Love  
Claudia Madison  
Adam Massmann  
Marty Meyer-Gad  
Jennifer Prybylla  
Lynn Rozen  
Darryl Schultz

Patsy Schultz  
Alan Thom  
Mary Walker  
Mary Wiese  
Dorothy Zeller

## Community Farm Volunteers

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Lydia Ambrose  
Church of Latter-day Saints  
Karli Deslauriers  
Sabrina Ehmke  
Shafer Ehmke  
Soren Ehmke  
Federated Insurance  
Lara Fletcher  
Janice Gorman  
Hope Interfaith Center  
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Esa Miller  
Lisa Miller  
Olivia Miller  
Rachel Mueller  
Greg Peterson  
Jeff Plath  
Raj Saride

Matthew Smith  
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United Way  
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Nathan Hanel  
Elaine Hardwick  
Lynn Rozen  
Patti Ruskey  
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Amy Hunt  
Melissa Martensen  
Laura Marsala Peterson  
Paul Prew  
Michael Rutkowski  
Mary Tacheny  
Madison Vandersee

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT DEEP ROOTS BY DEE CZECH

The roots connecting me to LEC have been growing since the mid-1990's. I was a member of the Minnesota Earth Sabbath Team and worked alongside SSND and CESRM. I became an SSND Associate, joining their Earth Committee. When they decided to sponsor annual Earth Conferences, I became a member of that Task Force. I have worked planning Earth Conferences since their inception in 2006. I guess one could say that LEC inherited me from the history of how it emerged from SSND.



This shaped how I continue to live today. I believe in the interconnection of all creation, and that when respect is lived full circle, communion happens.

LEC is a lively example of living this reality. They honor the dignity of the human-earth relationship. With the death of my parents, I began searching for a way I could honor their legacy by donating to a cause that spoke to who they had been in life. I didn't have far to look. LEC seemed the perfect fit.

My motivation for donating to LEC goes back to my roots. I grew up on a farm in central Minnesota, in a family of nine children. My parents lived their lives with a reverent respect for the workings of nature. The planting, tending, and harvesting were always done with consideration for nature.

The comprehensiveness and inclusion that has gone into LEC planning their way forward is so important to the fruitfulness of their work. They recognize and blend both the giftedness of earth and the giftedness of humanity. With gratitude and anticipation, I look forward to continue deepening my roots with LEC.

# COMMUNITY CONNECTION: HOMESTEAD APARTMENT GARDEN UPDATE

After initially reaching out last year, then spending time planning the project over the winter, residents of Homestead Apartments gathered in mid-May with LEC staff and volunteers to break ground for the Homestead Community Garden.

The project grew in scale from initial planning to implementation. "When we first began envisioning the garden with Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership (SWMHP), we would have been delighted if two or three families wanted to participate in the first year," Marsala Peterson said. "We are beyond thrilled to have 13 families gardening!" The garden consists of a fenced in area with 13 plots for families and a children's garden.

Marsala Peterson and LEC Volunteer Lynn Rozen have worked with residents to turn over the plots, create pathways, and offer gardening instruction as needed. They will meet weekly with residents



Homestead Community Gardeners work delivering compost to their new garden plots. The photo is from a group work day in May, the plots have since been planted and are now full of vegetables which will be ready to harvest later in the season.

throughout the summer and have monthly gatherings in the new garden space.

"It is so exciting to see the garden rise from the ground this season. It started as an expanse of grass and grew into a lovely growing space," Rozen said, "Families now have the opportunity to grow fresh food right where they live. Friendships are forming around keeping tomatoes watered."

"One of the gardeners told me they love to visit the garden every night, just to watch the plants grow," she said.

According to Marsala Peterson, the project is exceeding all expectations. "It has been successful because it was implemented in partnership with residents, ensuring that we built a garden that met the specific community's needs," she said. "It has given us a template for how to work with future clients to install community gardens."

## 2022: A LOOK BACK



After three years of holding the conference virtually we were overjoyed to host our 17th Annual Earth Conference, Honoring Biodiversity: Reviving Interconnection, in person. In partnership with the MNSU Environmental Committee, the conference was held in the MNSU Centennial Ballroom. Here our ED Laura Marsala Peterson moderates a conversation between speakers Megan Schnitker, Bruno Borsari, Sabrina Mercedes, and the audience.



In October we held our First Annual Family Fun Farm Night at the Community Farm. Community members of all ages joined us to celebrate a productive year at the Farm. Activities included making apple cider from apples grown at the Good Counsel orchard, Farm tours, crafts, caramel apples, and more!

### Here are a few our 2022 highlights:

- Just over 2400lbs of fresh organic produce, grown by LEC Staff and Volunteers was donated to our community partners
- Our Community Garden was full with 115 gardeners and their families, growing healthy food and quality relationships.
- In collaboration with Region 9, through a USDA Grant, we began our Emerging Growers Program to address food sovereignty in the Mankato area.
- Hosted 30 unique events and programs - from Annual Summer and Winter Solstice Celebrations, to Pick your Own Flower Arrangement, to Yoga in the Garden.
- Partnered with MRCI to host a Garden Plot for their Clients and with MNSU College of Allied Health and Nursing to host the Eng-AGE-ment, dementia friendly garden.
- Worked with youth from Mankato MYPlace, Headstart, and YMCA Day Camps at both the Garden and Farm, learning about and tending garden plots.
- Our Winter Reading Series met January - March to discuss *The Future Earth*, *The Seed Keeper*, and *How to Be Alive*.
- Hosted two in-person Creating Common Ground events where we worked together to find the commonality between Free Art & Flower Arranging and Poetry & Pottery.



In October LEC participated in Old Town Mankato's Day of the Dead Celebration. We hosted an information table with free seeds and a block printing activity, as well as preparing an ofrenda to remember the women of LEC who have gone before us. Lisa Coons, S. Sylvia Borgmeier, S. Mary Hecker, and S. Dorothy Olinger were honored.



A group of young gardeners gathered in May to plant a "pizza garden," growing tomatoes, peppers, onions, and basil. They came back in August to harvest their produce and make pizzas in the garden that they got to take home, bake, and eat!



# GROWER SPOTLIGHT

## A CONVERSATION WITH LENA CHEPNGETICH LANGAT

### BY MADISON VANDERSEE, FARM MANAGER

MV: *Tell us a little about yourself.*

LCL: I am originally from Kenya. I moved to Nebraska in 2019 then to Mankato for school in Spring of 2020. I am from the Kipsigis community which occupies the highland western part of Kenya. It is known for its vast farms and plantations of black tea. My family are small scale tea, cattle, and horticultural farmers practicing organic farming and producing our own milk, eggs, meats, and varieties of vegetables.

MV: *How/when did you first connect with Living Earth Center?*

LCL: I connected with LEC back in 2021. While in Nebraska, I was introduced to a community farm so when I came to Mankato, I looked up community gardens on the internet and that is how I started gardening at LEC.

MV: *What are you growing this year? Can you tell us a bit about your favorite crops?*

LCL: This year I have tomatoes (Roma and the Big Boy varieties), okra, red-bulb onions, strawberries, spinach, kale, butternut squash, corn, beans, and 2 types of African vegetables: isoik/managu (African Nightshade) and isageek/saga (Spider Flower/Cleome).

MV: *Who do you grow with?*

LCL: I grow with my friends from the Kenyan community. We share seeds, seedlings, knowledge, and help each other out with watering and other gardening chores.

MV: *Why is growing food important to you?*

LCL: Gardening is important to me first, because it is part of who I am. I grew up working on the farm. Therefore, through gardening, I feel connected to my Kenyan culture, and it helps reduce homesickness. In Kenya, we are encultured in the art of growing our own foods and “sweating” to earn a meal!

Through gardening, I get vegetables that I can't access in the grocery stores. I have learned to process and keep these vegetables so I can enjoy them throughout the year. Watching what I have grown grow



(especially the managu and saga) is so fulfilling. I consider gardening a form of free therapy as it is so calming and grounds me.

MV: *What advice would you give to someone who wants to start growing?*

LCL: Find a community like LEC and you will get all the advice and help you need to get started! I was amazed at how gardeners at the LEC garden were so welcoming, friendly, and so interested in learning about my culture and the vegetables I had growing! Most farmers actually thought my vegetables were weeds.

MV: *How is your experience growing at the Community Farm? Successes? Struggles?*

LCL: Starting out at the community farm was difficult at first as it was a new land and needed a lot of work! The heavy rains in the beginning of the growing season were a challenge, but making beds and trenches solved that. We have received immense help and support from you, our amazing farm manager, Laura (LEC Director) and Jim (volunteer). You provided us with the tools (even procuring jembes (grub hoes)), compost, pest control products, and ensure we have access to water for the plants.

Being a sizable number of farmers growing similar things also helped as we are able to bounce ideas off each other and share seeds and seedlings.

MV: *Can you share a favorite recipe?*

### Lenah's Fried Managu

#### WHAT YOU NEED

- Two bunches of the managu (African nightshade)
- Two whole medium-sized tomatoes
- One red-bulb onion
- One cup whipping cream
- Salt to taste
- Cooking oil

#### HOW TO PREPARE MANAGU:

1. Pluck the leaves from the stem and wash them
2. Boil the leaves for 30-45 minutes or until they are tender.
3. Let all the water evaporate. Do not strain the water as it contains the nutrients.
4. Fry the onions until golden brown
5. Add diced tomatoes and cook until it becomes a paste, then add the boiled vegetables.
6. Let the mixture simmer for about ten minutes.
7. Add the whipping cream to the cooked managu. Fresh milk, fermented milk or sour cream is a good alternative, depending on one's taste.

Let the vegetables simmer for another 10 minutes, then serve.

#### Serving Tips:

Goes well with Ugali (white corn maize meal). Add beef, mutton stew, or fish and you will thoroughly enjoy your meal.

*Pictured below served with Ugali and goat meat.*





## LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



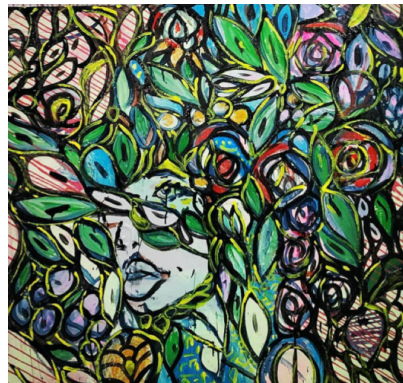
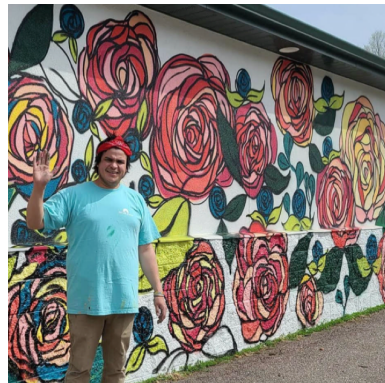
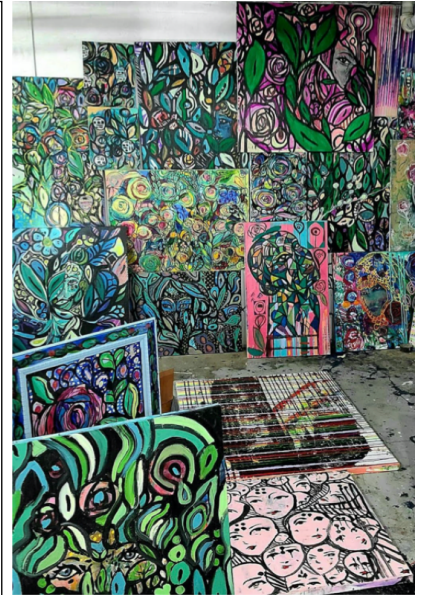
Justin Ek is an artist from Mankato, MN known for his community murals, paintings, social media presence, intricate weavings, and work with youth and nonprofits in the area. He is passionate about using his skills to make a positive impact on the community and often



volunteers his time to work with youth and nonprofits for free. Justin's art reflects his love for nature and the world around him, and he is constantly looking for ways to use his art to inspire others and make a difference in the world.

Justin is co-owner of 108 Alchemy in downtown Mankato where he sells his artwork and the work of other local artists. He founded the Mankato Art Crawl, is involved in the City Art Walking Sculpture Tour, and is an active board member of the City Center Partnership. He is always looking for ways to use his talents to improve the community.

Justin is also known for founding the Old Town Mankato Day of the Dead with his family. The event is a celebration of life and death that takes place every October in Old Town Mankato.



## REAL FOOD FOR REAL PEOPLE

### Sister Monica's Rhubarb Dessert *from Monica Wagner SSND, LEC Board Member*

This is one of my favorite recipes. While it's perfect with freshly picked rhubarb, you can also use other fruits like apples or peaches as the seasons change.

Grease an 8x8 pan, put 1/4" water in bottom.

4c rhubarb, cut up - place in pan

Topping:

1c flour

3/4c sugar

1 stick butter

Cinnamon to taste

To make topping: mix flour and sugar, then cut in butter.

Place on rhubarb and then sprinkle with cinnamon.

Bake at 375° for 20 - 30 minutes.

Enjoy!!

