

GROWING RHUBARB IN YOUR GARDEN



Rhubarb is a perennial vegetable grown for its leafstalks that are used for sauces, pies, jams, jellies, and puddings. Once established, plants can remain productive more than 12 years. Only the leafstalks should be eaten because the leaves contain poisonous oxalic acid.

SOIL REQUIREMENTS

Fertilizer and lime should be applied according to soil test. The pH should be 6.0 to 6.8, P₁ should be near 50, and a K test should be near 300. Annually top-dress with 1 cup of 12-12-12, spread in a circle around each plant in the spring and add another ½ cup after harvest.

Rhubarb does well in high organic matter soils which are well drained. Planting in a raised bed helps ensure against crown rot.

WHAT TO PLANT

Rhubarb variety names are somewhat confusing. Different names are assigned to the same variety across the country. Popular

rhubarb varieties include the following Canadian varieties: Canada Red, Crimson Red and Valentine, known for their red stalks. A Canadian pink variety called MacDonald also produces well. Victoria develops pink speckling on light green stalks, and German Wine is a speckled green stalk variety similar to Victoria but more vigorous.

WHEN TO PLANT

Plant rhubarb roots in early spring when the soil can be worked. Rhubarb can be planted in the fall if necessary, but remember that chances of survival are less during that time of year.

HOW TO PLANT

The hole should be about 8 inches deep and 12 inches across, and you should add two shovels of compost or manure. Plant the root with the crown bud 2 inches below the surface. Remember, you want to grow your plant on a raised bed. Space the plants 36 inches apart in rows and add ¼ cup of 12-12-12 worked into the soil for each plant. Firm the soil around the root but leave it loose over the bud. Water the area after planting. Keep it moist but not wet. Do not let your new planting become too dry.



HOW MUCH TO PLANT

You can expect around 2½ pounds of stalks annually from each established crown.

HARVESTING

The general recommendation is to not harvest any leafstalks the first year. One light harvest may be taken the following season if plants are vigorous. Beginning the third year, you should be able to remove all leafstalks for harvest. The harvest season runs from mid-March to mid-June. The stalks may be harvested at one time or selectively over a 4- to 8-week period.

After harvest, store stalks in the refrigerator and keep moist until used.

Cut the stalks at the soil line and remove the leaves after harvest. Remove flower stalks as they appear.

WEED CONTROL

There are no chemicals labeled for rhubarb. A 3- to 4-inch layer of deep mulch will help control weeds and conserve moisture.

INSECTS AND DISEASE

Rhubarb is relatively free of insect and disease problems, although crown rot can be a problem in wet locations. This is a reason we suggest a raised bed growing area.



Rhubarb curculio can attack the stalks so watch for this insect and pick off when found. This insect is a large rust-colored snout beetle about ¾ inch long.

FROST DAMAGE

In early spring, newly emerging rhubarb may become frost damaged. Leaf injury may be some black or brown discoloration on the edges. Because severe cold injury may cause oxalic acid in the leaves to move to the stalks, it is recommended you do not eat the stalks. *Remember safety first—do not eat rhubarb stalks that have been frosted.* Cut those off and compost them. Allow new stalks to develop before eating.

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