



## RHUBARB

Rhubarb is a hardy, cold season perennial vegetable. It is grown for its tart, succulent leaf stalks that are usually cooked like fruit for sauces, pies, jams, preserves and wine. Rhubarb also cans and freezes very well for eating out of season.

### Varieties

Rhubarb varieties are divided into two groups, those with red stalks and those with mainly green stalks. Green stalked varieties are somewhat larger and more vigorous. They include 'Victoria', 'German Wine', and 'Suttons' Seedless'. Red varieties include 'Ruby', 'McDonald', 'Valentine', 'Canada Red', 'Crimson Wine', 'Cherry Red', and 'Strawberry'.

### Bed Preparation

- Since rhubarb is a perennial it needs to be in an area that normal garden work doesn't disturb. It needs a sunny location with deep, well-drained soil.
- Before planting, cultivate soil and mix one pound 16-16-16 or 20-20-20 or two pounds 5-10-10 or 10-10-10 fertilizer for every 100 square feet.
- If available, an application of manure worked in at planting is beneficial.

### Planting

- Rhubarb is usually grown from roots or crowns purchased through catalogs or from local garden centers. Roots are also obtained by division of older plants. (See below.) Rhubarb seed is not recommended because new plants often don't match parent plant.
- In early spring plant roots about three feet apart in rows four feet apart. Place crown no more than two inches below soil surface. Firm soil and water deeply. Rhubarb may be planted in the fall, but spring is preferred.
- One to two vigorous plants will generously feed a family of four.

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## Care

- Rhubarb needs frequent and deep watering.
- Rhubarb is a heavy feeder. Plants should be fertilized twice a year. In early spring just before growth begins, apply one to two pounds balanced fertilizer per 100 square feet. After harvest, apply about eight ounces ammonium sulfate per 100 square feet. Work fertilizers into top two or three inches of soil staying about eight to ten inches away from plants.
- In the fall, after frost kills the tops, dig down eighteen inches on two sides of each plant (about twelve inches from center) and add two shovels of manure or compost and cover with soil.
- Remove seed stalks as they appear. The plant will produce longer and better.
- Rhubarb suffers from few diseases or insects.

## Division

- Rhubarb can be divided when it is three or more years old.
- Plants may be divided spring or fall, but spring is preferred. For spring division it is helpful to mark the location before plant dies back in the fall.
- Divide roots so that each section contains a strong bud. Trim pieces by removing all broken roots and shortening long thin roots. Don't allow roots to dry out during division/planting process.
- Vigorous plants will produce 5-10 new root sections. Very old plants may have only outer fringe of usable buds. Discard woody center.

## Harvest

- **Do not** eat rhubarb leaves. They contain oxalic acid and can cause severe poisoning.
- Harvest **no** stalks the first year. The second year, harvest for only two to three weeks. Third year and after begin harvest as soon as stalks are large enough. Continue harvest until hot weather or until stalks decline in size and quality -- usually about six to ten weeks.
- Rhubarb is ready when stalks are about ½ inch in diameter or larger. However, very large stems are often tough and dry. Leave small stalks to grow.
- Do not remove more than 1/3 of developed stalks at any one time.
- **Do not** cut stalks, or roots may be damaged. Grip stalks near base and pull up and twist slightly to one side so that stalks snap off clean resulting in a spoon shape at base.