

RHUBARB



Rheum rhabarbarum

Rhubarb is a handsome food plant well deserving a spot in the ornamental garden. Enjoy harvesting the tart, reddish stalks for use in sauces and pies.

PLANTING

Dig a large hole approximately 1' wide and deep. Mix compost or composted manure with the soil (ratio 2 parts soil to 1 part compost/manure). Scratch in ¼ cup of all purpose fertilizer in the bottom of the hole. This perennial grows from large, fleshy rhizomes. Space plants 24-36" in rows 3-4' apart. A mature plant can be 3' wide and 4' tall. Cover the crowns with an inch or two of soil. Water it in well.

CULTURE

Plant in full sun with rich, well-drained soil. For good growth and continuous production, feed plants with a fertilizer high in phosphorous and potassium in spring and again in midsummer. Water in the dry summer months is beneficial for production.

If rhubarb plants send up flower stalks simply cut them off. The flower stalks will sap energy from the plant, reducing production of leaf stalks.

Sometimes a rhubarb plant will send up only green stems even with the best of care. This is a genetic condition that will not change. You can eat green rhubarb; many say it's just as good! Replacing the plant is the only true fix for the situation. If a plant sends up a mix of green and red stems, mark the red stems and divide out the green ones in late fall.

HARVESTING & PRUNING

Allow plants to grow undisturbed for their first year. Harvest in the second spring by pulling a few leaf stalks from each plant over a period of a couple weeks. Always leave at least half of the plant's foliage to sustain the roots. Stop harvesting when the plant sends up slender stalks. This signals that the plant's energy reserves are low.

VARIETIES

Crimson Red: Bright crimson stalks up to 2' long, red to the core. Retains its color when cooked. Full, rich flavor with a good blend of sweet and tart. Reliable producer of heavy crops. The most commonly grown variety.

Victoria: Standard main crop variety with broad crimson stalks that shade slightly to crimson inside. Thick and tender. Tart. Average quality. More likely to flower. Heavy commercial producer.