



Gardeners Helping Gardeners Succeed

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All About Rhubarb

Rhubarb is best started from rooted crowns, which can be planted in early spring. Get a division from a friend or a local nursery, so you'll start with a plant that is already adapted to your local growing conditions.

This vegetable is a perennial to USDA zone 3, although with winter mulch, it can be hardy in even colder climates. While rhubarb prefers cool weather, the plant can usually adapt to hot summers (especially if you started with a local strain). It's heat-tolerant in AHS zones 8 to 1.

For tender and juicy stalks, give rhubarb your best soil in full sun (or part shade in warmer climates). Be sure the soil is rich and well-drained. Raised beds and plenty of perlite or sand can improve drainage.

Once established, a well-fed plant will produce 8 to 10 pounds of stalks every spring. Three plants should provide plenty for a family of four rhubarb lovers to eat. To give a new plant a chance to establish itself, try to wait two years after planting before you harvest. Be patient! If you just can't stand it, you can sneak a couple of stalks from each plant one year after planting.

For the best flavor and texture, harvest stalks when their leaves have opened completely, or when they're about 1/4 pound each. And to keep the plant healthy, never harvest more than a third of the stalks at any one time. Gently grasp the stem close to the crown and pull while twisting slightly. Stop harvesting when the plant starts producing only slender stalks. In a well-fed rhubarb patch, this usually gives you about six weeks of rhubarb heaven. Remember — only eat rhubarb's stalks. Its leaves contain high concentrations of oxalic acid, which make them poisonous.

Feed rhubarb with a thick layer of *Bumper Crop Black Soil Conditioner* or aged manure each spring. And make sure that it gets plenty of moisture: mulch will help keep the soil continually moist but not soggy. In addition, to keep production up, cut flower stalks off at the base when they appear. Once the plant starts putting energy into setting seeds, it may slack off on the stalks.

Divide a crown when the middle stalks become spindly. In early spring, dig up and separate it into softball-sized rooted pieces with at least one bud each.

Varieties

Canada Red

Cherry Red

Crimson Cherry

Victoria

Red inside & out; tender stems are short & thick

Rich red inside & out; heavy producer with long, thick stalks

Red inside & out; plump stalks with nice sweet/tart balance

Light-red to green; early maturing, juicy stalks