



Adding Color to Your Life

PLANTING AND GROWING RHUBARB

Rhubarb produces a rosette of large leaves on the end of long stalks. The leaves are poisonous and must not be eaten, but the stalks are edible and are widely used for baking and preserves. Rhubarb is very hardy, and withstands drought, but cannot tolerate being wet for long periods of time as this causes crown rot. The main root is a thickened portion called a rhizome; this is where the food for the plant is stored. A more fibrous root system will establish from this rhizome, which will take up water and nutrients from the soil.

When planting rhubarb, dig the hole slightly larger than the container or the roots, and amend the soil with compost or other decayed organic matter at a ratio of approximately 1:3 (one part compost to three parts soil). The crown, or main growing point, of the plant should be slightly above (~1/2") soil level to allow the crown to dry out and stay healthy. Replace the soil around the roots and water generously to get rid of any air bubbles in the root area. The plants should be spaced about 3 feet apart to allow for mature size. Rhubarb is a greedy plant, and should be fertilized annually starting the second year with a basic vegetable garden fertilizer to maintain production.

A light harvesting of the stalks can be done the first year the rhubarb is planted. After the plant is established, the stalks can be harvested continually during the spring and early summer. To harvest the stalks, grasp the stalk at the base and pull or twist. The stalk should snap free from the crown. Cutting of the stalks with a knife or scissors may spread disease to the rest of the plant and is not recommended. Once the stalks are free from the plant, the leaves may be removed with a knife.

When the plant becomes too large, and starts sending up 'daughter' plants, they may be divided in the fall by digging the entire plant and separating the smaller plants with a sharp, clean knife. These may then be replanted in the garden. Always make sure to leave enough space between the plants for them to fully mature.

Rhubarb recipes are as plentiful as zucchini recipes. The stalks can be used in pies, crisps, sauces, jams and jellies.