



Growing Rhubarb

Rhubarb pie! Rhubarb jam! Rhubarb cobbler with strawberries! You want to grow Rhubarb now, don't you? Happily, it is very easy to do so. All Rhubarb will ask of you is to be harvested regularly. You couldn't ask for an easier plant to grow for so many delicious goodies to come from.

Rhubarb is sold in the spring as a potted plant. You may also occasionally find it as bare root stock. Several varieties are available. Plant Land carries green stalked, tart tasting 'Victoria' and red stalked, sweet tasting 'Crimson'. One plant of Rhubarb will provide enough stalks for two people to enjoy plenty of fresh eating plus a modest amount for freezing or canning. They are fairly large plants, reaching 4' wide at maturity. Give them a spot with sun at least 5-6 hours a day.

Dig a hole 18 to 24" deep and wide and amend the soil with compost. Even though the root you plant is small it will develop a very long and deep taproot. Rhubarb needs good drainage so add peat and sand to clay soil. Sandy soil will be fine with just a generous helping of compost.

Plant the Rhubarb root so that the crown is just at the soil level. Water it in well but be sure it is not too soggy in spring. It can be prone to rot in cool, wet weather for the first season or so.

Water your plant regularly to keep the soil evenly moist. This will help develop sugars for good flavor. Each spring, before the shoots emerge, a heavy (2-4") top dressing of well rotted manure or compost will give the heavy nitrogen consuming Rhubarb plenty of food for the season. You can top dress again during the harvest to be sure the plant has plenty of energy to store for the next year. You can also use any fertilizer with a high first number (nitrogen) such as 10-0-0.

New plantings should be harvested lightly for 2 to 3 seasons, taking only a few stalks and only early in the season. After 3 years you may harvest as much as one half the stalks at one time. Always cut off the flower stalk that the plant produces in early summer. It looks much different than a stalk and is readily identifiable. Cut it out as soon as you identify it or else the plant will put energy into flowering and the stalks will be smaller. The stalks will become thinner in diameter as summer goes on and you should stop harvesting by the middle of July.

Rhubarb can live up to and produce well for 20 years. It is relatively unbothered by most pests including deer. Always harvest your Rhubarb whether you plan to use it or not. The plant needs to be harvested to thrive. You can simply wash and freeze stalks whole for later use.

Also note that only the stalks are edible, the leaves and roots are poisonous. They are extremely toxic to both humans and animals and immediate medical care should be sought if they are eaten.