

Rhubarb

Planting

- Before planting, eliminate all perennial weeds.
- Choose a site that is well-drained, fertile, and preferably in full sunlight. It does best where the average temperature falls below 40°F in the winter and below 75°F in the summer.
- Plant rhubarb roots (not seeds) in early spring well before the first light frost so that root development may take place.
- Dig large bushel basket-size holes. Space rhubarb plants about 4 feet apart and plant the roots 1 to 2 inches below the surface of the soil.
- Be sure to mix compost, rotted manure, or anything high in organic matter in the soil. Rhubarb plants are heavy feeders and need this organic matter. Don't add a chemical fertilizer when planting rhubarb or during the first year of growth. Direct contact with nitrates can kill your rhubarb plants.

Care

- Mulch generously with a heavy layer of straw and cow manure to provide nutrients for the plant, retain moisture, and discourage weeds.
- Water your plant well. It needs sufficient moisture during the summer.
- Remove seed stalks as soon as they appear.
- After the first spring, apply a light sprinkling of a high-nitrogen fertilizer (25-3-3 or 10-6-4) when the ground is thawing or has just thawed, so that the fertilizer will go into the ground and not harm the roots.
- Insects and diseases won't bother rhubarb plants as long as you keep the plants weed-free.
- Dig and split rhubarb roots every 3 to 4 years. Divide when plants are dormant in early spring (or fall).

Harvest/Storage

- Do not harvest any stalks during the first growing season so that your plants can become established.
- Harvest the stalks when they are 12 to 18 inches long. Usually after 3 years, the harvest period runs 8 to 10 weeks long. If the stalks become thin, stop harvesting; this means the plant's food reserves are low.
- Grab the base of the stalk and pull it away from the plant with a gentle twist. If this doesn't work, you can cut the stalk at the base. Be sure to discard the leaves!
- Always leave at least 2 stalks per plant to ensure continued production. You may have a bountiful harvest for up to 20 years without having to replace your rhubarb plants.
- After harvest time, the stems may die back. Just remove all plant debris. Once your ground freezes, it's best to cover rhubarb with 2 to 4 inches of mulch, preferably well-rotted compost; by adding nitrogen to the soil, you're preparing the rhubarb plants for a good spring season.