



Growing Rhubarb

Rhubarb is a cool season, perennial plant that is very winter hardy and resistant to drought. The succulent stems are used in sauces and pies, and can be eaten raw or stewed in desserts. The leaves contain oxalic acid and should not be eaten.

Propagation and planting

Rhubarb can be grown on a wide range of soil types, providing they are well drained, but prefers deep loams well supplied with organic matter. Plant in the spring in full sun. Set crowns 3' apart and cover with 2"- 3" of soil, or plant at the same depth as it is in the pot, if it is potted. The soil should be cultivated deeply and amended with compost or composted manure prior to planting.

Rhubarb should be allowed to grow one full year before harvesting. The second year a few leaves may be pulled from the outside of the plants for a two week period. The following year a full harvest may be taken by harvesting the largest stems over a period of 6 weeks. On a mature plant some small harvests can occur in early winter.

The seeds should be cut off. Side dress annually with an all purpose fertilizer in late June. Mulch with composted manure every fall. Usually, rhubarb crowns should be divided after about 5 to 7 years, but division can be made earlier if the crown is becoming crowded with small buds which tend to produce small inferior stalks. Dig the crown and cut into pieces with one large bud per section.

Storage - Cut all the leaf from the rhubarb stem. The stems will keep well in the refrigerator for two to three weeks in sealed plastic bags.

Nutrition Information - Rhubarb is a source of potassium, contributes minor amounts of vitamins, and is low in sodium. One cup diced rhubarb contains about 26 calories.

Preparation - Discard any leaves and trim the ends. Peeling rhubarb is unnecessary. Rhubarb requires sweetening to minimize the extreme tartness. It can be served as a sauce over ice cream, combined with fresh strawberries, or made into pies, tarts, puddings, breads, jam, jellies, and refreshing beverages.

Microwave Instructions - Wash about one pound of fresh rhubarb and cut into one inch pieces (about four cups). Place in 2-quart covered casserole with 1/4 cup water and microwave on high for six to eight minutes. Stir every two minutes.