

Growing Rhubarb



Rhubarb is a perennial vegetable, grown for leafstalks to be used for pies and sauces. Leaf blades of the rhubarb plant should not be eaten, as they are poisonous. Rhubarb varieties for outdoor production are characterized by pink-to-red stalks or petioles. Below is a quick guide for growing rhubarb.

Category	Directions and Notes
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earliness if favoured by a southern exposure, free from shading trees or building. • Rhubarb is perennial, so it should be planted to one side or at the end of the garden so as not to interfere with planting and growing other vegetables.
Soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhubarb will grow and produce on moist soils, but a deep, well drained sandy loam or silt loam is preferred. • Organic matter in light soils should be increased by adding peat moss, cattle manure, or compost.
Planting Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhubarb is not grown from seed but from roots or crowns of plants at least one year old. These new crowns or sets come from older crowns. The sets can be purchased in pots and can be planted from early spring and fall. • The crowns should be planted 1 m apart in each direction. • Crowns should not be covered too deeply, 5-6 cm will be adequate; and the tops of the buds should just be visible above the soil surface. • Established rhubarb should be divided every 5 to 7 years or when the stalks become thin. • Planting stock is prepared by splitting a crown into 4 to 8 pieces depending on crown size, so that each new set or crown will have at least one bud and a large root piece for nourishment. • Only healthy plants should be used for replanting. • Spring division is preferred, although rhubarb can be planted in the fall after dormancy occurs. A good rule for spring planting is to plant as early as soil can be worked.
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An 8-10 cm deep mulch of clean straw, sawdust, peat moss or similar material can help control weeds and conserve soil moisture for plant growth and development. • Flower stalks should be removed as they appear.
Harvesting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leafstalks should not be harvested the first year and only a few of the second year. After the crop is established the second year, rhubarb is harvested in the early summer. • When harvesting, take only the largest stalks, leaving sufficient leaf area to ensure a good crop the following year. The leaf tissue should be removed and discarded. • After the last harvest the plants should be allowed to grow until killed by frost. • The rows can be covered by 8-10 cm straw mulch. Remove half the mulch before growth starts the following spring.
Special Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended varieties include Sutton's Seedless, Valentine, McDonald and Canada Red.