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HOW TO GROW AND HARVEST RHUBARB

Rhubarb is best started from rooted crowns, which can be planted in early spring. For tender and juicy stalks, give rhubarb your best soil in full sun. Be sure the soil is rich and well-drained. Raised beds and the addition of perlite and/or sand can improve drainage of your garden soil.

Once established, a well fed plant will produce 8 to 10 pounds of stalks every spring. Three plants should provide plenty for a family of four rhubarb lovers to eat. To give a new plant a chance to establish itself, try to wait two years after planting before you harvest.

For the best flavor and texture, harvest stalks when their leaves have opened completely, or when they're about ¼ pound each. And to keep the plant healthy, never harvest more than a third of the stalks at any one time. Gently grasp the stem close to the crown and pull while twisting slightly. Stop harvesting when the plant starts producing only slender stalks. In a well-fed rhubarb patch, this usually gives you about six weeks of rhubarb heaven. **Remember only eat rhubarb stalks. Its leaves contain high concentrations of oxalic acid, which make them poisonous.**

Feed rhubarb with thick layer of compost each spring and make sure it gets plenty of moisture. Mulch will help keep the soil continually moist but not soggy. In order to keep production up, cut flower stalks off at the base when they appear. Once the plant starts putting energy into setting seeds, it may slack off on the stalks.

You shouldn't have much trouble with pests. In spring when the leaves are out and the weather is cool, you may notice that slugs occasionally eat holes in the leaves. Don't worry, though. This damage is only aesthetic and shouldn't hurt the health of the plant.

Divide a crown approximately every 10 years or when the middle stalks become spindly. In early spring, dig up and separate it into softball sized rooted pieces with at least one bud each.

To fertilize your rhubarb you can use Nitrate of soda.