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# **rhubarb**

## **PLANTING & GROWING**

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Lloyd H. Lyall

Ottawa Research Station

Rhubarb, a hardy herbaceous perennial, is a delicious and profitable plant to grow in a permanent location in the garden or field. When grown in the garden it should be planted at one side or at the end.

### **SOIL**

Rhubarb will grow on any well-drained soil, but the best is a light loam, deep, moderately moist, and rich in plant food. A somewhat heavy soil may be satisfactory if it is well drained, but the texture should be improved by the admixture of river sand and well-rotted manure or peat. Early rhubarb is in demand in the spring and brings the best price at that season, but it has to be grown on a light soil, which warms up quickly, and, preferably, in a location with southern exposure.

As the land must be free from perennial weeds, grow a hoed crop the year before planting rhubarb. Just before you set out the plants, work well-rotted manure into the top few inches of soil.

### **OBTAINING ROOTS**

As rhubarb seed does not produce plants that are true to type, you must use root parts from plants of known variety. Valentine, Ruby, and Macdonald are all good, but Valentine has the best combination of yield and quality.

If you are starting a brand new plantation in the garden, buy roots of a known variety from a nursery. If, however, you plan to establish a large uniform field and you are able to secure good-sized healthy plants, you should use these as propagation stock. Select plants with well-developed crowns and dig them up. Do this either in early spring as soon as the frost is out of the ground or in the fall after the leaves have ripened, usually in late September. Cut the crowns in pieces with one or two buds, or eyes, on each piece of root. If good crowns are scarce and you want quick establishment, cut pieces with only one bud, making sure, however, that the root portion is not too slender. If plenty of roots are available for propagation, use larger pieces. You will then be more certain of obtaining a satisfactory stand of plants. When these plants have grown for three years they may again be divided in the same way.

## PLANTING

Mark off the rows 4 feet apart, and, if you intend to have only a few plants, dig holes 4 feet apart in the row and deep enough to receive the roots.

The importance of the proper depth to set the plants cannot be over-emphasized, because deep planting retards normal development, induces the growth of spindly leaf stalks, and leads to general lack of vigor. When the roots have been set in place, just barely cover the tips of the buds with soil. Never put manure in the bottom of the holes, because, as the manure rots, the plants settle too deeply into the soil. Good rich surface soil, firmly filled in around the roots, gives the best results.

If a large plantation is to be set out, space the pieces of roots 4 feet apart in plowed furrows. If you plan on further propagation, however, you can economize by setting the plants 2 feet apart in the rows. After two or three years, remove every other plant. You will then have a permanent plantation with plants 4 by 4 feet apart, and plenty of plants for propagating.

## FERTILIZING AND CULTIVATING

Each fall apply a liberal top dressing of well-rotted manure and simply leave it on the ground over winter. For a large area apply 20 tons of manure per acre. In addition, 100 to 150 pounds per acre of a 5-10-15 or similar balanced commercial fertilizer will be found very beneficial. Apply the fertilizer in early spring before growth starts. If manure is not available, the organic content of the soil may be increased before starting the plantation by growing soil-improvement crops such as rye grass or soybeans, and turning them under.

In early spring, cultivate between the rows to mix the manure mulch and fertilizer with the soil and to destroy any perennial weeds. Cultivate now and then during the growing season to keep weeds in check, but take care to avoid injuring the crowns and fleshy roots.

## CROPPING

No leaf stalks should be pulled during the first year of a plant's growth, and, to maintain good vigorous production, stalks should not be pulled very late in the season. If many stalks are removed, the roots cannot build up a reserve for the following year's crop, and the plants often produce spindly leaf stalks. For a large crop it is best to have a large plantation and to pull only a few stalks from each plant. A plantation that has been given good care should remain productive for at least 10 years.

## FORCING

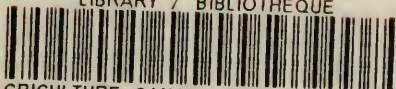
Forcing rhubarb for market or for home use during winter is rewarding and provides a welcome treat for the family. Rhubarb is in great demand from December until the outdoor crop appears on the market in May. The varieties Victoria, Sutton's Seedless, and German Wine are best for forcing.

Set out crown divisions, especially for the purpose, two years before you plan to use the plants. Dig the roots in late October or early November before the ground freezes, and take as much soil as possible with them. Let them lie on the ground until the soil is frozen through. Slight freezing is important because it helps to induce rapid forcing, but severe freezing can be injurious.

It is best to have a dark, frost-proof cellar or cheaply constructed forcing house, heated by stoves, where the roots can be placed on the ground and covered with moist sand or cinders, but the space under the benches in a greenhouse may serve the purpose. When the roots are frozen sufficiently, bring in the first batch. Keep the temperature at 55 to 65° F. Lower temperatures tend to produce a highly colored stem that grows slowly, whereas higher temperatures force the growth too rapidly, weaken the roots, and produce poor color in the leaf stalks.

From time to time, apply water to the sand or cinders to keep the plants from wilting. Manure or fertilizer is not needed because the roots have an adequate amount of food stored up in them. If you expect to plant the roots outside again, pull only four or five stalks from one plant. After the crop has been cut, take the roots outdoors, put them on the ground, and cover them with litter. Plant them in early spring. Bring in a second lot of frozen roots two weeks after the first lot. These will begin to yield a crop about the time the first lot is ready to be put out. From the time the roots are brought in until the first pulling is made will be about four weeks.

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