



Growing Rhubarb

(*Rheum rhabarbarum*)



Rhubarb is a cool season perennial that can grow to 5 feet tall. It can also be container grown in a large pot with a minimum of 3 cubic feet of soil (half barrel size).

Caution: Eat only the Rhubarb stalks, as the leaves are poisonous.

Plant rhubarb in full sun to part shade from fall to early spring from rooted crowns or seed. (Seeds take two years before first harvest, crowns one year.) Two or three plants are enough for a family of four. Rhubarb requires a cold winter and is not productive in areas with very hot summers. Winter temperatures below 40°F are required to stimulate bud break and subsequent spring growth. Summer temperatures under 75°F help maintain vigorous growth. Very high temperatures may cause the plant to go dormant. In mild winter areas you can artificially induce dormancy in the fall by withholding water for several weeks after the plant has stopped producing stalks.

Rhubarb grows best in acidic (pH of 6.0 to 6.8), well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter. Prepare your site by removing all weeds, as there are no weed killers safe to use around rhubarb. Till soil 12 to 16 inches deep adding ***Gardner & Bloome Acid Planting Mix*** to your soil to make a half and half mix. Space plants 3 to 6 feet apart. Crowding will result in a diminished crop and increase the chance of disease. Backfill hole with soil mix so that when you put the rhubarb crown in the hole, the growing point of the crowns are level with the surrounding soil surface. Work ***Gardner & Bloome Tomato and Vegetable Fertilizer*** into the top 10 inches of soil. Place rhubarb crown in hole. Back fill remaining soil mix. Firm up the soil around the root portion keeping it loose at the crown. Water in well. Keep moist until established. After that, water only when needed, maybe every 2 weeks in dry weather, by deep soaking. Rhubarb plants are very tough! In future years as the first growth begins in spring apply ***Gardner & Bloome Tomato and Vegetable Fertilizer***.



Remove all flower stalks as soon as they appear as they reduce the vigor of the plant. It may continue to produce flower stalks, so keep cutting. Do not harvest your Rhubarb the first year after planting. The second year pick lightly and only stalks that are 1 inch thick. The third year you may pick all you want, but usually no more than 1/3 to 1/2 of the total plant. To pick, grasp the stem and using a sideways twist snap it off at the base of the plant. DO NOT cut with a knife as this leaves a stub which can rot and spread into the crown. Stop harvesting by mid-summer. To store, cut all leaves from the stalks and put stalks in sealed plastic bags into the refrigerator for up to three weeks. If your plants get hit by a frost or freeze you can still eat them as long as the stalks are still firm and upright. If they appear soft and mushy, do not eat them. If in doubt, throw it out! Check out www.rhubarbinfo.com for more information.



Growing Horseradish

(*Armoracia rusticana*)



Horseradish is a perennial, often grown here as an annual. It grows to 3 feet tall and 2 feet wide. One or two are enough for a home gardener. A word of caution: Horseradish is a fast grower and can be invasive. Try it in a large container (half barrel) or treat like bamboo and grow in a bottomless pot. It can get root rot so rotate planting sites every 3 – 4 years.

Plant in fall or early spring in full sun. It tolerates part shade but grows more slowly. Use sets (root pieces) that are finger width in diameter and about 12 to 18 inches long. Mix your native soil half-and-half with ***Gardner & Bloome Harvest Supreme*** to a depth of 12 inches. Dig a trench or a hole about 6 inches deep and mix in ***Gardner & Bloome Tomato and Vegetable Fertilizer***. Place the set in it at a 45 degree angle with the flat cut ends near the top. Cover with soil mix mounding it up 3 or 4 inches. Water well. Keep soil slightly moist through growing season. After leaves appear, use ***Gardner & Bloome Tomato and Vegetable Fertilizer*** 2 times during the season. Note: Excessive nitrogen causes forked roots (more difficult to prepare than a single large one).

The flat end becomes a crown sending up several clusters of leaves. Remove all but one or two clusters to keep the main root thick. Trim back the lateral roots beginning when the plant reaches 12 inches tall to direct energy to the main root. This process is called lifting. Simply use a hoe to dig through the mound to gently lift the crown end. This breaks off roots forming at the crown. Do this a couple of times during early and mid-season.

Harvest after a hard frost kills the leaves. Use a garden fork to dig up entire plant. Wear gloves as the pungency of the root can irritate your skin. Any root left in the ground will re-sprout. The main roots are your harvest. The thickest side roots, about a half inch in diameter and about 10 inches long, are your sets for next year. Cut square across top of root and trim the bottom at an angle so you can remember which end is up! DO NOT compost unused roots as they will grow in the compost pile too! Shake off any dirt, then wash and dry the harvest. Sets may be stored in the refrigerator loosely wrapped in a plastic bag until next spring. This simulates winter. Another method is to start harvesting after frost, but dig only along the outside of the clump harvesting roots from the edges as you need them. Freshly harvested horseradish is best. Dormant roots have the most flavor. If your root has a greenish tint or leaves are sprouting, place it into a plastic bag and refrigerate for two weeks to induce dormancy.



To process, peel the root, dice it, then grind it in a blender. Do this near an open window as the fumes are quite strong! A basic recipe is to fill the blender half full with diced root, add a small amount of water and ice and grind to desired consistency. To preserve and enhance the flavor add two or three tablespoons of white vinegar and a half-teaspoon of salt or one tablespoon of sugar. Vinegar stops the heat building enzyme activity caused by crushing. For milder horseradish add the vinegar 1–2 minutes after processing, for hotter wait up to 6-8 minutes. You will not taste the vinegar. Store in the refrigerator in a clean jar with a tight lid. Flavor diminishes rapidly with time after processing so you can store the root and grate an inch or two off the bottom as needed. Add prime rib and enjoy!