

Hints for Gardeners – Rhubarb

Plant Rhubarb in early spring when the soil is tillable. Frost will not kill your rhubarb so early planting is okay. Mix in organic matter to your soil. Aged cow or horse manure are great. Your soil needs to be fertile and well drained. Preparation of the soil is important since this is a permanent bed. Soil should have a pH range of about 6.0 and 6.8. Your local county extension agent or local farm store should be able to connect you to someone to determine your pH and soil needs. This will require a minimal fee.

After you have prepared your soil and you have taken delivery of your plants, you are ready to proceed. We suggest rows be at least 5' apart and the plants no closer than 3' apart in the row itself.

Place your Rhubarb plants into the soil with the buds facing upward. We plant ours so the bud is flush with the soil surface to slightly below an inch or so below the soil surface will be okay.

As soon as the stalks emerge you can either till the soil by lightly hoeing or you can apply mulch. We have done both. You can mulch heavily with compost, leaves, grass, paper, etc. Water weekly if needed. About 1" per week is sufficient. Better to underwater than putting too much. Rhubarb does not like excessive water logged soil.

Remove the seed stalks as soon as they appear because they will take away from producing leaf stalks. Leaf stalks are needed to absorb the sun's energy to establish a good root system. Whenever you have extra compost, your plants will love it. You can also add a balanced fertilizer like 10-10-10 about 10' from the plant. A handful around each plant should be enough. Applying calcium nitrate will give you that big beautiful leaf you want to get the full benefit of the sun. You may wish to fertilize a number of times during the growing months.

Don't harvest your first year from planting, but remember to keep the flower (seed) stalks removed. They will be taller than the rest and straight up the middle. The second year, harvest a few stalks/petioles but leave most for the development of your roots. By the third year, harvest at will during the spring from your first surge of stalks. So not harvest the second crop of stalks. Leave those to replenish your plants needs of the benefit of the sun.