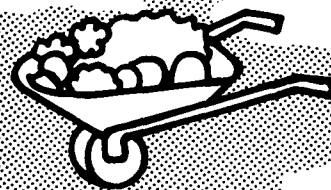
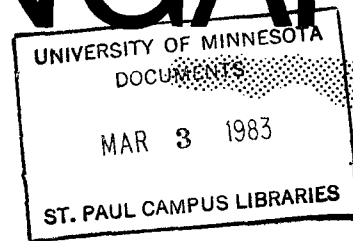


AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE—UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

YARD'N'GARDEN



Growing Rhubarb

FACT SHEET 112
C. GUSTAV HARD

Rhubarb, a popular herbaceous perennial, is grown for its large, thick leafstalks or petioles. It is commonly used in sauces and pies, and as a substitute for fruit in the diet.

Rhubarb, a native of the colder portions of Asia, grows best in regions having cool, moist summers and winters cold enough to freeze the ground to a depth of several inches. It is a member of the buckwheat family. The common cultivated rhubarb belongs to the species *Rheum rhaponticum*. Three commonly grown varieties are: Mac Donald, Chipman's Canada Red, and Valentine.

Preparing the Soil

Rhubarb will grow well in any deep, well-drained, fertile soil. Before planting, spade the soil to a depth of 12-16 inches and mix in rotted manure, compost, or other form of organic matter and a complete fertilizer, such as 5-20-20, at a rate of 1 pound per 10 feet of row.

Rhubarb is very tolerant of soil acidity. It grows well in soils having a pH between 5 and 6.8. If the soil pH is too low, ground limestone should be incorporated into the soil before planting. Liming required to adjust the pH should be based on a soil test.

Planting

Rhubarb plants should be located in an area of the garden where they will not be disturbed by normal annual garden work. A few plants will supply all that the average family can use.

Planting should be done in early spring before growth starts. Plants for a new planting may be purchased, or they may be obtained by dividing established crowns of old plants. To divide a plant, lift it from the soil and cut the roots into pieces, each with one or more large vigorous buds. Plant the root divisions 4-6 inches below the soil level. Be sure the root divisions are placed upright when they are replanted.

As a rhubarb plant gets older, the leafstalks commonly become smaller each year. For best results, a new planting should be started in a new location every 6-8 years.

Fertilizing

Rhubarb plants require a lot of organic matter and large amounts of balanced, complete fertilizer. Top dress each plant with well-rotted manure in the fall. In the spring, apply a pound of complete fertilizer, high in nitrogen, around each plant. An early spring application of organic matter will hasten growth or force the plant.

Harvesting

Rhubarb should not be harvested until the third year after planting; however, a limited number of leafstalks may be pulled in the second year. To harvest, pull the leafstalk upward and to the side; do not cut them. Always remove and discard the leaf blade portion.

Note: Do not eat rhubarb leaf blades. They contain oxalic acid and are poisonous. The leafstalks (petioles) are the only part eaten. They contain harmless malic and citric acids and are not poisonous.

The harvesting period for rhubarb extends throughout spring and early summer until July 1. Do not harvest during late summer and fall unless the bed is to be discontinued. The leafstalks have maximum color, flavor, and tenderness in early spring. Quality will be lower if harvesting is done in the hot, dry weather of late summer and fall.

Once established, rhubarb plants will produce flower stalks each season. Flower stalks should be removed, by cutting, as soon as they appear. This will preserve manufactured food materials for new leafstalks.

Forcing

By forcing, you can grow rhubarb indoors during the winter. In late fall, dig up a few plants and place them in a protected place where they will freeze, but not dry out. Roots left outdoors to freeze should be covered lightly with soil. After freezing for several weeks, place the roots in a container and cover the crowns with 2-3 inches of soil or sand. The plants should be grown in darkness or semidarkness for best color and quality. The ideal temperature range is 50°-65°F.

Problems

Curculio is a snout beetle that attacks leafstalks.
Do not spray insecticides on the plants.

Thin stalks are usually an indication that the plant
needs to be divided.

Poor growth could indicate that the plant needs to
be fertilized. If fertilization does not help,
divide the plant and replace in a new location.

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