



**CORNELL
COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION OF
ONEIDA COUNTY**

HOME GROWN FACTS

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GROWING RHUBARB

This tart, easy-to-grow perennial is great for pies and jams, especially when coupled with strawberries. It comes to life when temperatures rise into the 40s F, making it one of the earliest spring crops.

Site Characteristics

Sunlight:

- full sun
- part shade

Yields best in full sun.

Soil conditions:

- requires well-drained soil

Well-drained, deep, fertile soil, high in organic matter, pH 5.5 to 6.5. Yields best with plentiful, consistent moisture.

Hardiness zones:

- 3 to 8

Needs extended temperatures below 40 F.

Plant Traits

Lifecycle: perennial

Ease-of-care: easy

Height: 2 to 3 feet—Flower stalks may reach 5 feet tall.

Spread: 3 to 4 feet

Bloom time: early summer—Remove flower stalks to increase production.

Flower color: white

Foliage color: medium green

Foliage texture: coarse

Shape: cushion, mound or clump

Shape in flower: flower stalks with upright spikes

Special Considerations

Tolerates:

- frost - Hard freezes in late spring can damage leaf stems.

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.

How to plant:

Propagate by division or separation - All cultivars are hybrids and do not breed true from seed.

Maintenance and care:

Carefully consider location before planting this long-lived perennial. If possible, establish planting area and improve soil the season before planting.

Plant dormant crowns, as soon as you can work the soil in spring. You can cut crowns into pieces, but make sure each has at least one strong bud. Plant 1 to 3 inches deep and 2 to 3 feet apart.

Mulch to suppress weeds and retain moisture. Plants require little or no fertilizer.

Remove flower stalks as they appear the first year to give strength to developing plant. Do not harvest any leaf stems until plants are well-established the second year. Removing flower stalks helps plants channel energy into leaf stem production.

Growth slows and flower stalks form when temperatures warm in summer. In cool regions, growth may continue if you have adequate moisture and remove flower stalks. In warmer areas, growth may resume in fall - sometimes enough for a light harvest.

Horseradish makes a good companion crop, as both are long-lived perennials.

Renovate beds when plants become crowded and leaf stems small (usually in 5 to 15 years) by dividing crowns and replanting in fall or spring.

To force rhubarb in winter: Dig plant in autumn after dormancy but before the soil freezes. Pot with buds 1 inch below soil surface and keep outside for at least 8 weeks with temperature below 40 F. Move pot inside to cool, dark location. Keep soil moist, and rhubarb should be ready to harvest in about 6 weeks. (Stalks will be well-developed, but leaves will be small and yellow.) Replant outside in spring.

Pests:

Rhubarb is relatively trouble-free. Some potential pests include:

Rhubarb curculio - Handpick adults. Remove broadleaved weeds from area.

Other pests:

Potato stem borer

Mites

Diseases:

Rhubarb is relatively trouble-free. Some potential diseases include:

Fungal leaf spot - Avoid wetting foliage if possible. Water early in the day so aboveground plant parts will dry as quickly as possible. Avoid crowding plants. Space apart to allow air circulation. Eliminate weeds around plants and garden area to improve air circulation. Practice plant sanitation. When plants are not wet, carefully remove and destroy or discard affected plant parts. In autumn, rake and dispose of all fallen or diseased leaves and stalks.

Other diseases:

Phytophthora crown rot - Can be a problem in poorly drained soils.

Varieties

Look for different stem colors -- pink, red or green.

Ornamental varieties are different *Rheum* species.

Some varieties recommended for New York include:

Canada Red
Crimson Red
MacDonald
Victoria

Source: <http://www.explore.cornell.edu> 2006

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