

Welsh Fruit Stocks Rhubarb Growing Guide



Rhubarb is an attractive hardy perennial with large leaves and pink, red or greenish leaf stalks that are used as a pudding, often in pies, fools and crumbles. The stems are usually picked in spring, but plants can be covered with pots to 'force' the stems, that is to produce an early crop of blanched stalks in late winter. The flavour of rhubarb varies in sweetness depending on the age of the stems, and care should be taken with the leaves as they are toxic if ingested.

Planting

Location and Soil

All rhubarb varieties develop a deep root system and should be planted in fertile, partially shaded, well-drained, weed-free soil. Crown rot can become an issue in heavy or wet soils so improve drainage before planting.

Preparation

About a month before planting start digging over your soil, removing any stones you find and adding as much organic matter as possible.

Planting Method

The crowns should be planted into soil which has had plenty of well-rotted organic matter added. Dig a hole large enough to allow the top bud of the crown to be just visible, after firming in well. Plant 3-4' (90-120cm) apart.

Allow rhubarb to establish for one year before taking your first harvest. Pick the stems by gently twisting them and pulling from the base of the plant. Dead-head flowers immediately after they appear in the early spring, as allowing flowers to set seed will weaken the plant. After the leaves have died down at the end of the season, spread a new layer of compost around the plant to help retain water and keep weeds at bay. Leaves shouldn't be eaten as they contain oxalic acid and are poisonous.

Fruiting and Cropping

Pruning and Care

Rhubarb needs little attention and will provide you with delicious stems when little else is ready for harvest. It is a very hardy, frost-resistant vegetable - in fact it requires a period of frost in the winter in order to produce the best stalks.

Dig and split rhubarb roots every three to four years. Divide when plants are dormant in autumn (for early varieties) or early spring.

Pests and Disease

Rhubarb suffers from few diseases. Crown rot is the main threat, particularly if soil conditions are wet. The fungal infection occurs at the base of the stalks where crowns turn brown and soften. To avoid crown rot, make sure rhubarb is planted in fertile, well-drained, weed-free soil. Plants suffering from rot should be dug up and replaced, as the Rhubarb will not recover.

Feeding and Watering

Rhubarb is drought tolerant and should not require extra watering in sustained dry periods.