

RHUBARB CULTURE

I love rhubarb and believe every gardener should have at least a couple of these wonderful perennials tucked into a sunny location. It certainly doesn't need to be in the veggie garden. Why not in the perennial border? A rhubarb plant does, however, need a good 3 ft. of space. But then...oh boy, rhubarb sauce, pie, cake, and more. So yummy! Here's what you need to know.

Planting:

- Plant early in spring as soon as ground is workable
- pH should be in the range of 6.0 - 6.8
- Sunny, well-drained location
- Work 2-3" of compost into top 6-8" of soil prior to setting a division
- I also work about ½ cup natural, high phosphorus fertilizer (*Espoma Garden-tone* or *Espoma Bio-toner Starter*) into that top 6-8" of soil. It is not recommended to use a conventional fertilizer such as 10-10-10 until the second year after planting. I stick with all-natural choices.
- Set divisions in soil with buds ½" below soil surface, and press firmly in.
- Water to eliminate air pockets.

Harvesting:

- Do not harvest 1st year so that optimal establishment can occur.
- 2nd year- harvest just a few robust stalks.
- 3rd year stalks should be 1" or more in diameter and can be harvested for 6- 8 weeks.
- When stalks thin out and become shorter, it's time to stop harvesting for the year. The plant can then focus on photosynthesizing energy back into the crown for the following spring.
- You can use a knife to harvest, but I just get a firm grip on the stalk close to the soil surface and give a good tug. Out she comes!
- **DO NOT EAT THE LEAVES-THEY ARE POISONOUS!**

Maintenance:

- Keep weed-free
- Add 2" of compost around clump every spring
- 2-3 applications of natural fertilizer can be applied from early spring until the end of June. Do not fertilize after July 1.
- Pull all stalks producing flower heads
- Water during hot, dry spells, but do not overwater
- Enjoy!