



**By Brian Sams**

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## Rhubarb Fact Sheet

Rhubarb would have to be one of the more popular ingredients on the various cooking shows at the moment. It is actually a very easy to grow plant. Rhubarb can be grown from crowns or seed. Plant in an open, sunny position and feed well every year. The clump may be left undisturbed for many years but if you do want to divide the clump to increase numbers you are best to leave it for 4-5 years and then divide the plants. Rhubarb requires a deep, well-drained soil, enriched with well-rotted animal manure. Water well in dry spells and mulch the plants annually each spring with compost. Feed with a liquid manure to encourage stem formation. Cut out any flower stems that develop and pick stems very lightly in the first year. The best planting time for crowns is May to October. Plant the crowns just under the surface, 90 x 90 cm apart.

As Rhubarb is a cool season herbaceous perennial; the best stem colour is produced at 10°C. It grows as a perennial leafy plant and can reach a metre in height, with thick red stalks. It requires a cold winter and can be hard to grow in areas with very hot summers or high humidity.

To get the best varieties I would recommend buying from a crown (see image)

- Ever red – strong bitter taste best for stewing
- Sylvan Giant – thicker red stems for cooking and jams
- There are heaps of good varieties including some selected for warmer climates – see Green harvest for more details.



Only the rhubarb stalks should be eaten and they must be cooked. Rhubarb is rich in iron, and vitamins A and C. It is used as a 'fruit', and can be baked in pies and crumbles, it combines well with apples and ginger. Rhubarb leaves are poisonous and should never be eaten or fed to livestock or poultry.



#### **Important harvest information....**

Harvest by pulling the thickest, healthiest stalks off gently, do not cut them and leave a stub. If you do this you may invite a fungal infection in the crown of the plant. Do not take more than half the stalks of any one plant so that you leave enough leaves for photosynthesis.

#### **RHUBARB INSECTICIDE SPRAY**

Cut up 1 kg of rhubarb leaves, boil in 3 litres of water for 30 minutes. Strain through a cloth or old stocking. When cool, dissolve 30 grams of soap flakes in 1 litre of hot water. Add this to the mixture. Use as a general botanical insecticide spray against aphids, whitefly and caterpillars.

