GIVE YOUR FAMILY RHUBARB

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A few plants like this one can provide your family with plenty of rhubarb. (Photo by Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering, U. S. D. A.)

Rhubarb, often called "pie plant," is one of our most popular perennial vegetables. Primarily a cool-season plant it comes early in the spring when the supply of many vegetables is limited. For the home garden, where only a few plants will supply the family, place the rhubarb to one side of the garden with such perennials as asparagus and horseradish.

Varieties

There are relatively few varieties of rhubarb. If you prefer a red variety, McDonald or Ruby is adapted to Missouri conditions. In a green variety you will find Victoria a good producer.

Soils and Soil Preparation

Rhubarb may be grown on nearly any fertile well-drained soil. Since it is a heavy feeder, give it a heavy application of barnyard manure and fertilizer. Unless the soil is rich, apply 20 to 25 pounds of manure to each
plant (20 tons per acre). In addition, before you plant, apply ¾ to 1 pound of 5-10-5 fertilizer for each plant. This is about 1500 pounds an acre.

You will have better results if you mix some of the manure with the soil under each hill before planting. Make yearly applications of manure and fertilizer. From 20 to 25 pounds of manure and ½ pound of 5-10-5 fertilizer for each plant is sufficient. For best results apply the manure in the fall, and the commercial fertilizer in the spring.

**Planting**

Rhubarb is grown mainly from divisions of old plants because there is too much variation in plants produced from seed. Roots may be cut into as many divisions as there are healthy eyes or buds. Be sure that each division has at least one bud; it is better if there are two or three. Only strong, healthy plants from fields free of disease should be used in new plantings. You'll have better results if you get young crowns from a reputable nursery.

Plant the roots early in the spring in rows 4 to 6 feet apart and from 3 to 5 feet apart in the row. After opening a furrow, spread out the rhubarb roots and cover the crowns with not more than 3 inches of soil.

**Cultivation and Care**

Clean cultivate to keep down weeds and maintain a soil mulch. Before growth starts in the spring, harrow the bed thoroughly but carefully to avoid injuring the crowns. Apply the fertilizer at this time so as to mix it with the surface soil while harrowing.

**Harvesting**

Allow the newly planted rhubarb plants to grow two seasons before harvesting a crop. In the third year the harvest period will depend upon the growth, but usually should not be more than four weeks. After the plants are well established and making a good, vigorous growth they can stand a harvest period of from eight to ten weeks.

To harvest, pull the stalks—do not cut. Cut off the leaves. After the harvest season, seed stalks will grow up in the center of the crowns. You can increase the vigor of the plants and obtain a bigger crop next year by removing these seed stalks as soon as they appear.

**Diseases and Insects**

Foot rot is the most serious disease of rhubarb. It is caused by a fungus which attacks and rots the base of the stalks causing them to fall over. Often this disease kills the plant. The best way to prevent disease is to provide good drainage. Water should drain away from the plants soon after a rain.

The insect, rhubarb curculio, may give trouble. This is a rusty, snout beetle about ¾ inch long. It bores into the stalks, crowns and roots. Also, it attacks wild dock growing in the vicinity. This insect can be controlled by hand picking, by burning all infested plants and by destroying all wild dock growing near the rhubarb. The best time to do this is in July after the beetles have laid their eggs.

**Poisonous Quality of Leaves**

The succulent stalks of rhubarb make excellent sauces and pies and the question often arises about the use of the leaves for greens. Numerous
cases of more or less serious illness and some fatalities have been reported from both Europe and North America from eating rhubarb leaves. **We recommend that the leaves not be used as food under any circumstances.**

**Rhubarb Adds Tartness and Color to Meals**

Rhubarb is available for family meals early in the year before the other fruits and vegetables. Its fresh, tart flavor and clear pink color lighten up drab winter meals and add a fresh note to early spring dishes. Rhubarb has few calories, a fair amount of vitamin C, and very small amounts of other vitamins and minerals. Its chief value is in the flavor and color it adds to the meal. Color is lost if the stalks are peeled. Cut the rhubarb on a board or with scissors to prevent peeling. Red varieties are more popular than green because they add more color to the meal.

**Stewed or Baked Rhubarb**

Wash, remove base of stalks and leaves and cut into ½-inch pieces on a board or with scissors to prevent peeling. Add ½ cup sugar for each 2 cups of rhubarb (1 lb.). Cover and heat very slowly until juice is extracted, then heat more rapidly until tender, 3 to 5 minutes. A double boiler may be used. Or place rhubarb and sugar in a baking dish, cover and bake until the rhubarb is tender, 20 to 30 minutes. Each piece of rhubarb should retain its shape but be sweet through. Serve cold.

**Rhubarb Shortcake**

3 cups diced rhubarb  1½ tbsp. flour
1½ cups sugar  3 tbsp. butter
½ tsp. salt  6 tbsp. water

Blend the sugar, salt and flour. Add the rhubarb and water. Cook until rhubarb is done, about 5 minutes. Then add the butter and cool.

Separate the layers of warm shortcake, spread with butter. Cover the bottom layer with the rhubarb sauce. Set the top layer in place and pour remaining rhubarb over the top. Add whipped cream if desired and serve immediately.

**Rhubarb Betty**

3 cups bread crumbs  ¼ cup water
4 cups diced rhubarb  5 tbsp. butter — cut in small cubes
1 cup sugar

Put 1 cup of the bread crumbs in the bottom of a buttered baking dish, cover with half of the diced rhubarb, sugar, water and butter. Cover with another cup of the bread crumbs, then the remainder of the fruit, water and sugar. Mix the other cup of crumbs with the rest of the butter and sprinkle over the top. Cover. Bake in a moderate oven (350° F.) for ½ hour. Remove the cover and continue baking until the rhubarb is tender and the crumbs are brown, about ½ hour longer. Serve warm with cream or hard sauce.

**Rhubarb Pie** (One 9” pie—6 servings)

3 cups diced rhubarb  2 tbsp. flour
1 cup sugar  2 tbsp. butter

Pastry for 1 pie

Line the pie pan with pastry. Mix the rhubarb, sugar and flour. Pour
into lined pie pan. Dot with butter. Cover with pastry or a latticed top and bake in a hot oven (425°F.) until the crust is brown and the rhubarb is done, 30 to 40 minutes. To insure thorough baking of the lower crust, place the pie low down in the oven.

**Rhubarb Sherbet**

2 tbsp. gelatin  
3 cups cold water  
1 cup boiling water  

Soften gelatin in ½ cup of the cold water. Dissolve in the boiling water. Add the sugar. Stir until dissolved. Add the rhubarb, salt and rest of the cold water (2½ cups), and freeze.

**Rhubarb Punch**

To 2 cups of sweetened, stewed pink rhubarb add 1 cup of tea infusion, 6 tbsp. lemon juice, ½ cup sugar, 1 stick cinnamon and a bunch of mint, if desired. Chill. When ready to serve, strain and pour equal amounts into 12 tall glasses filled three-fourths full of cracked ice. Fill glasses with ginger ale (1 qt.). Serve immediately.

**To Can Rhubarb**

3 lbs. rhubarb  
1½ cups sugar  

Cut rhubarb into ½-inch pieces—using a board or with scissors to prevent peeling. Add sugar. Heat until sugar is melted and rhubarb is almost tender. Pack, wipe top of jar, adjust seal and process 10 minutes.

**To Freeze Rhubarb**

Use tender stalks only, preferably the pink variety. Wash. Remove stem and leaf ends. Cut in ½-inch pieces with scissors or cut on a board. Pack into freezer locker containers. Seal and freeze.

**Rhubarb Strawberry Jam** (Three ½-pint jars)

2 cups rhubarb, cut in 1½" pieces (1 lb.)  
3 cups sugar  

Cut rhubarb on a board or with scissors. Wash the berries, remove stems, drain and crush. There should be 2 cups of crushed berries. Add rhubarb, salt and sugar. Stir well. Cook rapidly with frequent stirring for about 30 minutes or until the jam gives the jelly test. Pour into hot jars and seal. If scales are available, use ½ lb. sugar to 1 lb. fruit.

**Rhubarb Conserve** (Four ½-pint jars)

4 cups diced rhubarb  
4 cups sugar  
2 oranges  
2 lemons  
¼ tsp. salt  
1 cup chopped almonds or other nuts  

Cut rhubarb in ½-inch pieces on a board or with scissors. Grate the rind from the oranges and lemons and extract the juice. Blend the rhubarb, rind, juice, sugar, and salt. Boil rapidly until thick—about 20 minutes. Stir in the nuts and pour at once into half-pint jars or jelly glasses. Seal.
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