

**Latin Name/Genus:** *Rheum rhabarbarum*  
Family: *Polygonaceae*

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Season:** Cool season

**Exposure:** Full sun

**Zone:** Hardy to Zone 2



**Timing:** Sow indoors in early spring and transplant or direct sow about 8 weeks after the last frost date where plants are to grow permanently. Optimal soil temperature: 16-25°C. Seeds should sprout in 5-10 days.

**Starting:** Sow 2cm (1") deep, but plan for large plants. One plant will typically satisfy the needs of one household. Farm rows 100-120cm (36-48") apart, plants 120 (48") apart in the row.

**Growing:** Ideal pH: 6.0-6.8. Any well-drained, moderately fertile garden soil will do. Mulch around plants in fall with finished compost or well rotted steer manure. Choose a sunny spot. Rhubarb is cold hardy and drought tolerant. After growth stops in the fall, the plants go dormant, and require a period below 4°C (40°F) to stimulate good spring bud growth. In the second year, remove flower stalks as they appear. Divide plants every 4-5 years; a well-maintained plant should produce for over a decade.

**Nutrient Preferences:** Provide macronutrients with excess nitrogen in the spring, and extra phosphorus in the fall (to help establish roots to survive the winter).

**Harvest:** Do not harvest during the first year of growth. Cut the tart red stalks in spring after the first year of undisturbed growth. Do not eat the leaves. Stalks can be harvested all at once or selectively as required.

**Diseases & Pests:** Watch for slugs around new seedlings. Otherwise, rhubarb is a tough, hardy plant with few pests.

**Companion Planting:** Rhubarb grows well with most Brassicas, which benefit from rhubarb's ability to deter whiteflies with its scent, deter black fly aphids from bean varieties, while taking advantage of the extra nitrogen beans replace into the soil. Rhubarb also grows well with alliums, which deter leaf beetles and weevils from destroying the leaves and stalks of young rhubarb. Strawberries and rhubarb are just as good together in the garden as they are in the kitchen: They're harvested at the same time and don't compete for nutrients or space. As a living mulch, strawberries also act as ground cover for rhubarb, tamping down weeds.