



Horticulture

Rhubarb in the Garden

The rhubarb stalk is used in pies, sauces, jams, jellies, and desserts. Although classed as a vegetable, rhubarb is used as a fruit because its high acidity gives a tart flavor. Only the stalks should be eaten because the leaves contain moderately poisonous oxalic acid.

Rhubarb does best in well-drained, fertile soil that is well supplied with organic matter. Adding organic matter like manure or compost to heavy soils improves the water drainage and reduces the chances of crown rot. Work the soil deeply (12 to 15 inches) and add liberal amounts of compost before planting.

Rhubarb is propagated mainly by dividing existing plants. Divide the crown of a healthy plant in early spring before growth starts and as soon as the soil can be easily worked. Dig deeply around the clump of rhubarb stems and lift the entire plant out of the ground. Separate the clump into a couple of pieces by cutting down through the crown between the buds. Two or three strong buds with 6 to 8 inches of root are all that are needed. Do not let them dry out. Set the divided section upright in the planting hole with the buds 1 to 2 inches below the surface. Space plants about 3 feet apart. Place new plantings where they will receive full sunlight and good water drainage. Firm the soil around the plant, but not directly above the bud, and water thoroughly. Rhubarb can be transplanted in the fall, about mid-September.

Rhubarb requires annual applications of fertilizer for good growth and large yields. Apply fertilizer in early spring before growth starts. Spread half a cup of a general garden fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 6-10-4 around each plant and work it lightly into the soil.

Do not harvest rhubarb the first two years after planting. This allows all leaves to



grow and produce food for good crown and root development. During the third season, harvest only for a four week period. Begin full harvesting in the fourth year. Cut stalks for 8 to 10 weeks, ending in mid-June. If harvested longer, the plant's food supply will be exhausted and next year's harvest reduced. Do not remove more than two thirds of the fully developed stalks from any plant at any one time. Wait until stalks are 10 to 15 inches long. Then grasp the stalk below the leaf and pull up and slightly to one side. Remove leaves by cutting slightly below the leaf and discard them.

Water rhubarb to maintain maximum top growth throughout the summer so the plants can store up food energy in their roots for a good harvest next year. Annual mulching with manure or compost improves the soil and water drainage. It also helps conserve water and control weeds. When controlling weeds with a hoe, cultivate shallowly to avoid root injury. Infertile soil, extreme heat, cold or drought may cause production of seed stalks. Old plants tend to bolt more than young ones. These seed stalks should be cut out as soon as they are formed because they reduce the vigor of the plant.

Rhubarb crowns often become overcrowded after 8 to 10 years. When this happens, the plant produces many small shoots and the yield is decreased. This problem can be controlled by dividing. After dividing the plant, wait for three years before harvesting again. (MJM)

Great Plants: 2000 Plants of the Year

Each year the Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association chooses a tree, shrub and perennial of the year. These are new or underutilized plants that merit wider use in Nebraska.

2000 Perennial of the Year
Butterfly Milkweed
(*Asclepias tuberosa*)

Drought tolerant herbaceous perennial. Showy dark orange-red flower clusters. Plant in full sun in a light soil. Grows 24 to 36 inches. Hardy to zone 4.

2000 Shrub of the Year

Chenault Coralberry
(*Symphoricarpos x chenaultii*)

Dense low-growing shrub with long cascading branches. Produces brightly colored pink to red berries in fall. Grows 3 to 8 feet tall. Hardy to zone 4.

2000 Tree of the Year
Pagoda Dogwood
(*Cornus alternifolia*)

Small tree with striking horizontal multi-tiered branches. White flower clusters in late spring. Plant in full sun or light shade in well-drained soil. Grows to 25 feet. Hardy to zone 4. (MJM)

Thank You Master Gardeners!

Six Lancaster County Master Gardeners were awarded plaques to recognize them for their years of service to the Lancaster County Master Gardener program. Pictured are Mary Gilmour-12 years, Bob Gilmour-12 years, Bertine Loop-12 years, LaVina Vagts-16 years, Gladys Jeurink-22 years and Don Crosier-15 years. We appreciate their dedication and support to University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension programming in Lancaster County. (MJM)



Plant a Tree

Good trees generally grow slowly, so they should be the first plants to be placed on the property. Trees are the basis of good design, and their location has more influence than any other plant.

Trees provide shade during the summer, protection from winter winds, protection from the noise of nearby street traffic, screening from the outside and elimination of undesirable views, and they add a sense of security and comfort. Trees can be used to modify heat and cold, as well as, to complement and develop natural beauty.

When trees are used near architectural structures, they can bridge the gap between the buildings and the ground on which they stand. Trees can divert attention, hide unwanted views, balance sloping ground, provide accent and a center of interest.

Probably no other natural feature can provide such a changing array of interest throughout the whole year. The lush, tender green of the early spring blends into the development of leaves and foliage to a rich, harmonizing mass of green. In the spring, flowers of certain trees have a beautifying quality and are followed by fruit and seed production.

As trees mature, other qualities become evident. The differences in branching systems become more pronounced. Texture and color in bark give year-round interest. Autumn color in some species makes worthwhile a whole year of waiting to see their glowing



hues. During extended winter periods, trees stand dramatically silhouetted against the sky, land and buildings. Most large growing trees should be planted at least 30 feet from the house, depending on the shape of the tree. Small trees should be at least 15 to 20 feet apart. To help you select a tree for your landscape, ask for fact sheet, Landscape Trees for Lancaster County FS-282. (MJM)

2000 April/May Garden Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3	4	5	6 Plant cool season vegetable seeds outside	7	8
9	10 Power rake or aerify bluegrass	11	12 Apply fungicide to pines for tip blight	13	14	15
16	17 Fertilize bluegrass	18 Fertilize tall fescue	19 Apply fungicide to crabapples for cedar apple rust and scab	20 Apply pre-emergence	21	22 Earth Day
23	24	25	26 Apply preventative fungicide to bluegrass	27 Control iris borer	28 Arbor Day	29 Spring Affair at State Fair Park
30	1 Apply fungicide to pines for tip blight	2 Control euonymus scale	3	4	5 Check pines for sawfly	6
7 Average date of last frost	8 Control billbugs in bluegrass	9 Put out rain gauge	10 Apply fungicide to pines for needle blight	11 Plant wildflower seeds	12	13 Plant buffalograss
14	15	16	17 Plant gladiolus bulbs	18 Fertilize zoysiagrass	19 Plant cannas	20
21	22	23	24 Plant warm season transplants	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Many of us need reminders. That is the purpose of this calendar. Check the calendar each month and follow the recommendations if they are necessary in your landscape situation. (MJM)