



How to grow Rhubarb in a Pot

Fruit or a vegetable? Given rhubarb is probably best known as a sweet crumble pudding topped with creamy custard, it would be fair to choose 'fruit'. But, we would be wrong. Rhubarb is technically a vegetable as it produces stalks (like celery), whereas fruits such as apples and strawberries all produce seeds.

Word of caution: whilst the stalks are delicious, the leaves are highly poisonous and must never be consumed.

Rhubarb is a hungry plant and takes a full year from planting a new crown to its first harvest, but once established, is an easy do-er, responding well with plentiful stalks for jams and puddings in return for fairly little input. Rhubarb prefers a free draining fertile soil, in semi shade. If soil conditions are problematic, rhubarb will grow happily in a large container. Applying an organic feed annually will keep it in top condition.



Ingredients for planting rhubarb into a large pot

What you will need to grow rhubarb in a container:

- Rhubarb crown (root) - shop/online purchase or a divided piece of an established crown
- A pot with good drainage holes (minimum 50cm deep/wide)
- Good quality compost with added nutrients/garden compost
- Grit/drainage gravel
- Label and pen
- Watering can

If using established rhubarb crowns, they should be divided and replanted late Autumn/throughout Winter (avoiding frosty conditions), with 'bought' rhubarb crowns available to purchase and plant at this time also.

Use a spade to lift an established crown from the soil and split roughly into chunks. Use your hands to break into hand sized pieces with new buds showing before replanting into prepared soil/pot.



Rhubarb crown before lifting and splitting with a spade



Rhubarb crown divisions ready for replanting

"File:Rhizomes de rhubarbe creusés par du verticillium.jpg" by FarceRéjeane is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

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How to grow Rhubarb *continued*

Step 1. Mix 3 parts good quality compost or garden compost with 1 part horticultural grit to ensure good drainage, filling the large pot $\frac{4}{5}$ full with compost/grit mix.

Step 2. Place the rhubarb crown into the centre of the pot leaving around $\frac{1}{4}$ of the crown exposed above the compost level.

Step 3. Label . Place the container in a sheltered spot, out of direct sunlight. Water well, remembering especially to water containerised plants during dry spells.

Care of new plants. Do not attempt to harvest rhubarb in the first year following planting : it requires this time to establish and build up energy reserves.

Pick a few stalks in year 2, and subsequent years can then be increased.

Remove any flowering stems that might be produced. NEVER eat the leaves—they can however, be added to the garden compost pile.

Stalks can usually be picked from April through to the end of July. Twist the stalks off at the base, do not pull from the crown. Pick no more than half the stalks available at any given time.

Forcing Rhubarb. Rhubarb can be 'forced' to produce an earlier harvest. Midwinter, or when the crown starts to show new growth, cover established crowns with a large solid pot (stuff any drainage holes with fabric) which stops light reaching the plant. Forcing Pots are available which are large terracotta pots designed specifically for the job. The lack of light and increased cold protection from the container will quicken the rhubarb's growth. Stalks should grow tall, being more pinkish in colour with smaller, pale yellowish green leaves and be ready to harvest in around 4 weeks.

Avoid forcing the same crown every year—allow a few years off in between forcing to allow it to re-energise and produce stalks naturally.



Newly planted crown



Monitor watering



Rhubarb crown pre forcing



Covered crown late winter



Forced rhubarb stalks—a delicious late winter treat

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