



### It's Rhubarb and Asparagus Time

Rhubarb is a 'love it or leave it' plant when you discuss its merits in a group. Taking sides, there is nothing more delicious than stewed rhubarb with cream or a crumble on top! Yes, those stems need sweetening as they are unpleasant unless cooked and no, the stems do not have to be red to be ripe! Tradition has it that rhubarb is red, but some varieties stay green. They still taste the same though! Rhubarb has a rather old fashioned feel to it but if you are looking for an easy to grow edible, then this is your plant. Note that the leaves are poisonous and should never be eaten.

How do you buy rhubarb plants? Generally these are sold as 'crowns' or in packets, with some protective peat moss or wood shavings to protect them. These 'crowns' are sections of a mature root system that has strong future growth points. You can sometimes buy potted plants as seedlings or as a more mature plant.

The soil must be richly composted – they are hungry plants, so add plenty of blood and bone or Dynamic Lifter to the composted soil. Full sun and good drainage is essential. Plant so that the growing points of the crown are just below the soil surface.

Be patient! It is best to allow the plants to mature and to not harvest until the 2<sup>nd</sup> season. They love some potash, so apply Yates Flower & Fruit fertilizer every now and then. When harvesting, pull the leaves away from the clump with a downwards twist – avoid using a knife. Always leave at least 4 stems. Every few years, lift the clump in winter and divide into smaller pieces, discarding any old root stock.

Rhubarb is easy to grow – you need a bit of garden space but once established you will have those rhubarb crumbles happening regularly.

Asparagus 'crowns' are also in season now and the story with these is actually very similar to that of rhubarb. The difference with these crowns is that they must be planted about 20 cm deep in a trench – again in very well composted, rich soil.

Asparagus will grow from that spear that we recognize to a mature, feathery plant, about half a meter or more tall. Eventually these tops brown off and die back for the process to start all over again. Allow at least one full season to pass before you begin harvesting. In season, the tips appear quite fast. As soon as you see a tip emerge from the soil, gently dig down to the crown and cut the shoot off. Check every day as they grow fast. A bed of about 10 crowns should feed a family and the crowns will last for many years. Feed and water regularly throughout the growth period and when the crop has finished, the spears will become very thin towards the end; allow the rest to go to seed.

**Life's a garden – dig it!**