



# GROWING RHUBARB IN CANBERRA

Rhubarb is a very hardy perennial plant that will keep on producing luscious stems for many years. The plants will also look great in the garden with their big leaves and showy red stems.

Economical bare-rooted crowns are available in winter and potted plants are usually available from mid spring. Rhubarb is easy to grow in the Canberra region if you shield it from the harshest sun.

## **WHAT DO I NEED?**

- A sunny place is best - at least half a day - but shelter from harsh afternoon summer sun.
- Good drainage - no wet feet.
- Soil well prepared with lots of manure, organic matter and fertiliser - OR a good quality potting mix.
- Avoid lime - they prefer acidic soil.
- Generous mulch to conserve water.
- Regular deep watering.
- Generous, regular fertiliser.

## **HOW DO I GROW RHUBARB?**

- Rhubarb is a very heavy feeder, so prepare the planting bed in advance with LOTS of well rotted cow manure, compost and a complete plant food - we recommend *Healthy Earth* fertilisers. A raised bed is ideal or you can mound the soil to ensure good drainage. Canberra soils are usually acidic, which suits rhubarb just fine, though you might need Claybreaker to deal with heavy clay soils.
- Plant bare-root crowns about 8cms deep in late winter or early spring or plant potted plants at any time. Space plants 80-90cms apart. Water in with a solution of *Healthy Earth Liquid Fertiliser* and Seasol to help them settle.
- Mulch with Pea straw, Lucerne or Sugar cane mulch. Water regularly and deeply during the growing season, especially when hot and/or windy, and fertilise regularly with *Healthy Earth*. Do not harvest stems in the first year in order to give your Rhubarb a chance to establish.
- Pick stems from the outside, sharply pulling sideways and down. Leave at least 4 stems on the plant to keep it growing. Do not eat the leaves, they are poisonous! Remove flower stalks as they appear.
- Rhubarb will die back in winter before bouncing back in spring. Tidy up dead leaves and lightly dig in manure and fertiliser late winter.

## **TIPS**

- You can grow rhubarb in *large* containers, but remember they are big plants needing a lot of water.
- Stem colour can vary between plants from red to green, especially if raised from seed, though all colours will be similar in taste. Red-stemmed plants will often turn a deeper shade of red in cool conditions and sometimes turn slightly greener if the weather is very hot.. Most named varieties are red stemmed, e.g. Sydney Crimson, Victoria & Ever Red - so choose one of these if colour is important. Green-stemmed plants will not change their colour.
- Divide plants every few years to keep them productive, keeping the most vigorous outer buds from the clump to replant in freshly prepared soil.