

Bluestem Breezes  
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## **Rhubarb Planting**

Rhubarb. Ooh la la! I remember the rhubarb patch at my grandparents and the delicious Strawberry-Rhubarb jam Grandma made each year. Her family and neighbor's loved that jam. In fact, one neighbor gave me the framed recipe handwritten by Grandma Berta Jean for our wedding. It's even written on notepaper from a local ag business – I love it.

Several years back I was given rhubarb crowns from Person B's grandma's patch. He, too, has great memories of his Grandma's rhubarb creations. I hear her Garden [rhubarb] Pie was phenomenal!

The rhubarb is growing great in my garden and so I'll keep my fingers crossed that these traditions continue for future generations of our family.

If you also have big shoes to fill when it comes to rhubarb, check out this information provided by K-State Specialist Ward Upham:

Rhubarb is a perennial vegetable that can be a bit tricky to grow in Kansas. It is native to northern Asia (possibly Siberia) and so is adapted to cold winters and dry summers. However, it is susceptible to crown rot and should not be subjected to "wet feet" and therefore should be grown in a well-drained soil. The addition of organic matter can increase drainage as well as raise the soil level so that crown rot is less likely. Also, have a soil test done as rhubarb does best with a pH below 7.0.

Rhubarb should be planted from mid-March to early April in Kansas. Mix 5 to 10 pounds of well-rotted barnyard manure into the soil for each 10 square feet of bed before planting.

Rhubarb is propagated from crowns (root sections) that contain one or two buds. Plants should be spaced 2 to 3 feet apart in the row with 4 to 5 feet between rows. The crowns are planted shallow so that the buds are just one-half to 1 inch below the soil surface. Firm soil around the crowns and make sure they are not in a depression that holds water. Recommended varieties include Canada Red, Crimson Red, McDonald and Valentine.

Rhubarb needs rejuvenated at least every 5 to 10 years and should be dug and divided in the same time period as new plantings are established. Use a cleaver or axe to cut crowns into sections that each contains one or two buds. Plant as described above.

Newly transplanted rhubarb should not be harvested the first year so the plant can recover from the transplant process. Only a few stalks should be harvested the second year to allow the plant to continue to build up its energy reserves. The harvest season for plants that are three years or older usually lasts about 8 weeks. Harvest only the largest and best stalks by pulling them slightly to the side so that they break away from the plant. Never harvest over one-third of the leaf stalks at one time. Only the leaf stalk (petiole) is eaten as the leaf blade contains oxalic acid and is poisonous.

Mulches can be used to reduce moisture loss, prevent weed growth and provide winter protection. However, it should be pulled away in the spring to allow the soil to warm so that early growth is encouraged.

For additional information, contact the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; [kamayer@ksu.edu](mailto:kamayer@ksu.edu); 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out [wabaunsee.ksu.edu](http://wabaunsee.ksu.edu).