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ASPARAGUS, GARLIC, HORESRADISH, & RHUBARB

Asparagus

Asparagus is a unique perennial vegetable harvested for its tender growth of spears in early spring. It's fernlike foliage is an attractive addition to the garden after harvesting is over. Most plants will produce for over 20 years, so pick your location carefully, to accommodate this large plant. Asparagus needs well-drained loamy soil located in full sun.

Soil: Work compost, manure or leaf litter deeply into the soil. Add enough to raise the bed 4-6" above the surrounding soil. The beds should be no more than 3-4 feet wide.

Planting: Plan on 10-12 plants per person. Plant the asparagus crowns in trench rows 8 inches deep and 12 inches wide. The crowns should be placed 18 inches apart in the rows, while rows should be 5-6' apart. Water thoroughly after planting.

Fertilizer: Apply fertilizer in early spring and in summer when the plant starts to enter the fern state. Use compost tea, manure tea, or side dress with organic fertilizer or 12-12-12 granular synthetic fertilizer.

Harvest: DO NOT CUT THE ASPARAGUS SPEARS THE FIRST TWO YEARS! The third year you may cut for approximately four weeks, The following years cutting may be extended. Cut or pull asparagus spears when 4-7" high to insure tenderness. If not snapping off by hand, hold a sharpened dandelion digger and push it no more than 1 inch beneath the soil surface to cut the spears. (Be careful not to damage the roots when cutting!)

Maintenance: Over the Years the crowns will push closer to the soil surface, resulting in spears that are smaller and less tender. Fix this by mounding 6" of soil over rows in the spring. Watch for pests in the foliage during the summer and disease problems in the crown. Next years crop depends on the fern growth made after the harvest, so allow the tops to remain on during the fall and winter. Cut the fern growth off in late winter or early spring when the new growth appears.

Varieties:

Mary Washington— dark green shoots that are thick and straight. Uniform heavy yields. Highly resistant to asparagus rust.

Martha Washington-dark green shoots. Excellent taste. Yields not as heavy as Mary.

Jersey Giant— Productive, with heavy yields and good disease tolerance.

RB3—Rust and Fusarium disease tolerant. Excellent quality, heavy yields.

GARDEN VEGETABLES



Rhubarb

Rhubarb pie, rhubarb muffins, rhubarb bars, ...tarts, wine and ice cream. With strawberries of course. Rhubarb is one of the most anticipated vegetables of the late spring early summer season. The tart stalks of this plant make for some great cooking when harvested and tamed with a little, or ,a lot of sugar. Here are some tips on growing your own Rhubarb patch.

Pick a sunny spot with a southern exposure and good soil. If the soil is just average, raise the soil bed by working in 6" of compost or manure to a depth of 8 inches. The plants will get large, so plant the crowns 3' apart in rows 5 feet apart. Each spring add compost around the plants and add organic fertilizer or 12-12-12.

Harvest: DO NOT HARVEST TH FIRST YEAR! You may harvest for a couple of weeks the second year. The third year the harvest season my be extended to 4-6 weeks. Pull firmly and cleanly from the base of the plant by hand. Harvest from late spring to early July.

NOTE: Only the stalks of Rhubarb are edible. Clip the leaf blades off at harvest and use to mulch around plants or compost. The leaves are poisonous and are not eaten.

Maintenance: If the leafstalks become thin over the years, the plant probably needs to be divided. Dig up and divide plant so 3-4 eyes remain on each portion and replant crowns in spring. Share any left over with neighbors. Lack of fertility can cause thin plants too. Watch for snails, slugs, and earwigs and control with slug pellets or an organic control.

Rhubarb varieties:

Canada Red - Stalks red throughout. Good producer.

Crimson Red - Stalks light red on outside, and green inside.

Valentine– Stalks deep, red color. Sweet, tender, and juicy stalks. Pink when cooked.

Horseradish

You have not lived till you have tried your hand at grinding your own horseradish, fresh from the garden. The oils from the plant will either instill a passion for the plant for life or burn your nostrils.

A vigorous perennial and wonderful addition to meat and fish dishes, the horseradish plant likes its soil to be rich, moist but well-drained soil. Find a sunny spot and space plants 1" apart, with the large end of the root cutting 2-3 " below the soil surface.

When the leaves are about 12 inches high in the summer, pull back the soil above the cuttings and remove all but one or two of the crown sprouts. Also, rub off the small roots from the sides of the cutting. Replace the soil over the crowns. Repeat this procedure in one month. This is necessary for top quality horseradish.

Harvest usually occurs in late October into November. Dig up the entire root. Pieces of the root will grow the following spring, but they will not possess the same quality as the previous crop.

Elephant Garlic (Grown the same as regular garlic; is six times larger than regular garlic.)

Prized in cooking and many other uses, Garlic should be a part of every garden. It is very easy to grow and stores very well.

Pick a sunny spot with well drained fertile soil. Plant the cloves 1-2" deep, in rows 12-24" apart with the cloves 6" apart. Keep weed free and do not allow to go bone dry.

For a larger harvest, allow the bulb to remain in the ground the first winter. Then harvest the following season. When the foliage turns yellow, cease watering and break the tops over the base to hasten drying. Carefully dig the bulbs and sun-dry them for a few days. Garlic stores best when stored under dry conditions with a temperature range of 40-60 degrees.