

Description

Rhubarb Victoria
Rheum Rhabarbarum
Family: Polygonaceae

Growing Tips

Rhubarb Victoria is a perennial vegetable but classified as a fruit since 1947. It produces large fan-like triangular dark green leaves up to 30cm in diameter, on thick fleshy red-skinned petioles that reach up to 50cm in length and grow from a thick rhizome root. The flower consists of a mass of green-white to rose-red petals arranged like a grape at the top of a round red, sometimes pink or light green stem that reaches up to 1m high. The whole plant can cover an area of 1.2sqm. This variety dies down in winter.

Parts Used

It likes fertile, humous-rich, slightly acid soil and semi-shade and does better in cooler climates. With less light the stalks are more tender and sweeter. Leaf growth is best in temperatures between 5 and 32°. To encourage earlier shoots in spring, a bucket or plastic sheet can be placed over the root while temperatures are below 5°. For best results plant about 1m apart and do not use leaves in the first year of the plant. The stems are rendered soft and mushy by the onset of frost and should be discarded as their oxalic acid content could be toxic. It is useful to thin the root clump every five to six years to avoid poor leaf growth.

Uses

Leaf stalk only. THE LEAF IS POISONOUS!

The fresh stalks are peeled and cooked for use on their own or with other fruit to add acidity in jams, compotes, sauces or desserts. The fresh stalk provides vitamin C, E, K, folic acid, calcium, potassium, iron, sodium and zinc.

Its medicinal use is derived from the accumulation of anthraquinones which exert a strong laxative effect. The root is the main ingredient in Chinese medicine and appears to lower blood glucose levels. It contains a brown substance which can be used in place of the walnut husk as a dye. The leaf, though poisonous and must not be eaten, can be used to prevent club root in brassicas; this is achieved by digging discarded leaves into a plot where Brassicas are planned for the next season.

Origin & History

Rhubarb is an important herb in Chinese medicine for thousands of years and has been found growing wild along the banks of the Russian river Volga.

In Medieval times Rhubarb was more valued as a herb than prized spices such as cinnamon and saffron, and a report from an ambassador to the Uzbekistan region in the 1403-5 placed Rhubarb alongside such merchandise as silk, satins, musks, rubies and pearl.

Marco Polo sourced the plant in Northwestern China and it found its way to Europe around the 14th century then the U.S. in 1820.

