



Project List:

Asparagus, Rhubarb & Horseradish

These three vegetables are somewhat different in the way they're planted and harvested, but can be well worth the effort. All can be grown successfully here in north Texas if you follow these tips.

- Compost**—Add more compost to your garden seasonally before each planting.
- Garden Soil Builder**— Soil Mender's blend of aged humus, manure, and alfalfa meal is excellent to amend soils intended for vegetables.
- Organic Fertilizer**— Best for edibles; try **Espoma's Tomato-tone** or **Garden-tone**.
- Liquid Seaweed**—An organic extract that strengthens plants for better resistance to temperature fluctuations, stress, and disease.
- Mulch**—Protect soil with at least 2-3 inches of a mulch suited to each crop.

This is a basic list to get you started. Ask a Garden Advisor for specific recommendations for each crop.

Asparagus

Enjoying this crop is an investment of time and space, but is well worth it, as it's very low in calories and a good source of nutrients. As it grows, it makes an attractive plant and can produce for up to 15-20 years.

SELECTION: Plants are started from 1 or 2 year old starts called crowns. They are dioecious— either male or female. The female varieties tend to produce smaller, yet more spears, but can tend to spend their energy on fruiting, and will sometimes seed outside their bed. Male varieties are more disease resistant, and are better producers of larger spears.

SITE: Asparagus does best in a location that will remain undisturbed for several years, as it takes 2-3 years to produce well. *Allow plenty of space:* mature plants can be close to 4' x 4', and asparagus likes to be in a bed by itself. Choose a site in full sun and thoroughly amend the soil with plenty of organic matter.

PREP: The trench method is typical. Dig a trench at least 10" deep and 10" wide. Space trenches 4' apart.

- Add 2" of well-rotted manure blended with compost to the bottom of each trench.
- Add an organic vegetable food at the rate of 1-2 teaspoons per linear foot; blend into the compost base.
- Backfill the trench with 1" of amended garden soil and rake lightly to blend with compost/fertilizer blend in bottom of trench.
- Make a slight mound of the amended soil down the center of the trench, and you're ready to plant.

PLANT: Place the crowns in late winter over the mound in the trench 12"-14" apart with the roots spread outward (if you're planting two rows, stagger the crowns so that they aren't directly across from each other).

(Continued on reverse)

- Immediately cover the crowns with 3" of compost to prevent drying out; then water them in well.
- In several weeks, the first young spears will appear. As they grow, *gradually add soil* around the shoots. At the end of the season, the trench will be level with the surrounding soil.
- Lightly mulch initially around the growing plants with 3" of a lighter material such as **pine straw** to reduce water loss and discourage weeds. Mature plantings can have up to 4-6" of a mulch layer.

FERTILIZE: Feed established crops before new growth begins in late January/early February, and once again after harvest, in mid-spring—late April/early May.

HARVEST: *Leave all spears to grow the first year.* These should be allowed to mature into the ferny foliage, which will support the growth and development of the roots for next year. Carefully cut spears 4-6" long just below the soil line. Harvest only sparingly the second year in order to encourage a great crop for the third year. Each year, allow some foliage to stay so that the plants gain energy for each successive growing year. Colder weather will help to produce larger spears. After the first hard freezes, foliage will be brown, and can be cut to the ground to prepare for spring growth. All plants have small, thorny 'hooks' on the stems, so handle with care.

Rhubarb

While rhubarb requires extra care due to our hot summers, it's well worth the effort: the edible stalks add a delicious, fruity flavor that's truly unique. Plants are started from small root divisions.

SITE: Rhubarb does best in a location where it can remain undisturbed for at least a year—it will produce better the older it gets. It does best in well-amended garden soil or a large container where it will be protected from the hot afternoon sun. Moving plants to the north side during summers can help.

PLANT: In soil amended with plenty of organic matter, plant the roots 3' apart—if planting rows, space rows 3'-4' apart. Plant the root with the top, or 'crown bud,' 2" below the soil surface. Water thoroughly! Don't let the soil get too dry, which is why good soil prep is always important. Mulch with 2-3" of **pine straw** or a shredded bark mulch such as **hardwood mulch**.

HARVEST: Only stalks are harvested, since the leaves have toxic levels of oxalic acid. Normally, you would not harvest any stalks the first year; instead allowing the root system to establish. However, since our hot summers can shorten the lifespan of rhubarb, you may choose to carefully harvest a few stalks, allowing a few to remain so that the plant can continue to photosynthesize and grow.

Horseradish

Horseradish is an easy crop to grow. The hot, zesty punch of flavor fresh from the garden is unbeatable! Purchased roots for horseradish usually have buds on one end, so you can tell which way is up.

SITE: Horseradish is not a fussy crop, but does best in full- to part-sun locations in soil amended with plenty of organic matter. Containers will work, but note that it may try to grow through drain holes.

PLANT: Bury the root standing 'upright' with the bud ends at the top, just above the soil level. Space roots 18"-20" apart; they'll grow up to 3' in height. Mulch with 2-3" of **hardwood mulch** or similar mulch.

HARVEST: Horseradish will perennialize in our area, but you must leave a piece of the root in the soil when you harvest each season for the plant to re-grow. Horseradish root can be used in sauces, slaw, potato salads, and many other recipes for that eye-opening, sinus-clearing zing.

See a Garden Advisor for additional help to be the most successful with these crops.

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