

Downy Mildew

Downy mildew frequently occurs in late summer and fall, and shows as a white, fuzzy fungus in patches on the undersides of leaves and rough blackened patches on roots.

Control

1. Avoid planting radishes after radishes in the same year.
2. Bury crop remains or remove them from field after harvest to prevent carry-over of diseased refuse, control volunteers and wild radish.
3. Reduce density of plantings in the late summer to improve air circulation.
4. Increase the phosphorus to potassium ratio of the fertilizer applied prior to late seedings.

RHUBARB (FIELD)

Varieties

German Wine, Macdonald, Crimson.

Propagation

Healthy, vigorous 3 to 4-year old crowns are divided to obtain two or more buds per seed-piece.

Soils

Use a well-drained but moisture-holding soil with a pH of 5.5 to 7.0. The lighter soils will produce an earlier crop but may require irrigation.

Fields to be planted should be plowed deeply and worked in the fall and spring to prevent the weeds from going to seed.

Fertilizers

A soil test is necessary to determine phosphate and potash requirements. See Chapter 3 for recommendations based on soil test results.

Lime should be applied if the pH is below 5.6. Do not apply manure or fertilizer within 2 weeks of the lime application.

Manure at 22 to 45 tonnes/ha (9 to 18 tonnes/acre) may be applied in the fall or as early as possible in the spring.

Fertilizer—In year of setting apply 80 kg/ha (32 kg/acre) nitrogen and the required phosphate and potash.

In subsequent years apply 170 kg/ha (68 kg/acre) nitrogen and the required phosphate and potash.

Fertilizer applications should be split into 3 side-dressings:

- before growth starts in the spring,
- after growth starts and
- after harvest.

Nitrogen rates may be reduced in the first two years with manure applications.

Planting

Planting is best done in the spring, but may be done in the fall where the soils are not likely to heave because of frost.

The seed-pieces are planted 7.5 cm deep, 60 cm apart, in rows about 120 cm apart.

Row Covers

The use of plastic mini-tunnels applied over rhubarb in February will increase early yield, but will not affect total marketable yield. Growers may wish to apply covers (not slitted or perforated) over a few rows to establish an early fresh market. See “Plasticulture”, Chapter 5.

Disease Control

Nematodes

Nematodes are microscopic worms which feed on plant roots and crowns. Infected plants are stunted with thin, narrow stalks. Plants seldom die but yields are greatly reduced.

Control

Before establishing new plantings, especially following berry crops or rhubarb, collect soil samples for nematode analysis. Fumigation may be required.

Ramularia Leaf and Stalk Spot

Conspicuous leaf spots appear early in the growing season. Under wet conditions, spots may appear on stalks reducing quality or making them unmarketable.

Control

Clean-up crop refuse at end of harvest by rotovating to encourage rapid breakdown.

Virus Disease

Rhubarb, being a perennial, vegetatively propagated-crop, is vulnerable to virus infection. Fortunately, plant to plant spread is usually quite slow in British Columbia.

Virus-infected plants are usually smaller than nearby healthy plants and the leaves often have distinct mosaic or ring patterns.

Control

In establishing a field, obtain healthy planting stock, or if doing your own propagation, select only the most vigorous- appearing mother plants. Rogue out and destroy plants with virus symptoms as they appear in a field.

Harvesting

Stalks should not be pulled during the first year of growth. In subsequent years, harvesting can be expected to start toward the end of March and to end in June. This will vary with management practices, with the variety being grown, and with the market demand.

Plants should not be overpulled at any time, as a certain amount of foliage is required for the development of the present crop as well as next year's crop.

A well-cared-for patch will last for 10 years or longer.