

## Forcing Rhubarb



### Traditional Rhubarb Forcing Pot

**Note the manure pile behind ready to stack around the pot.**

Now before anyone emails me to explain rhubarb is a vegetable, not a fruit, I'd like to say this. *Knowledge tells us that rhubarb is a vegetable and the tomato a fruit. Wisdom tells us which to pour custard over!*

Rhubarb used to be far more popular than it is today. I think part of the reason for its decline is our increasingly sweet tastes. Flavours drowned in more and more sugar. Because it is very easy to grow, we seem to have lost our respect for it as well.

At one time it was properly cultivated giving us forced rhubarb along with early, mid and late season varieties. A versatile fruit that was available from March to November. Now it seems relegated to a few old crowns neglected and half-starved at the bottom of the plot.

Anyway, even if you're not keen on rhubarb try forcing some. It's a far less acidic, sweeter and more delicate flavour that you may well enjoy far more than you expect.

Traditional garden forcing is quite different to commercial forcing as practised in the forcing sheds of the 'rhubarb triangle' of West Yorkshire. A large (and expensive) tubular pot was placed over a crown and covered with fresh stable manure. The pot excluded light and the fermenting stable manure gave off warmth to pull the crown into growth.

Because it has grown in the dark the leaves will be yellow and the stalks light pink rather than red but with that delicate sweet flavour I mentioned. The manure would serve to help the crown recover from the stress. Never force young crowns and give them at least two but preferably three years to recover.

A quick cheat method is to use an upturned black plastic dustbin as a forcer. Add manure around if available and hold the bin in place with a few bricks or rocks. If no manure is available then hopefully the bin will absorb any sunshine heat and force the rhubarb for you.