

How to grow carrots

Carrots (*Daucus carota*)

Family: Apiaceae

Season: Cool

Ease of growing: Moderate

Nutrient needs: Medium

Water needs: High

Common propagation: Seed

Seed facts

Germination temperatures: 45°F to 85°F

Germination time: 7 to 21 days

Viability: 2 to 5 years

Direct sow: April to July

Planning facts

Typical spacing: 1" x 24"

Plants per square foot: 16

Time to Harvest: 55 to 100 days

Variety selection

Carrots are classified by the shape and length of the root. Emperor carrots are long with small shoulders and a tapered tip; Nantes are medium length with a blunt tip; Danvers are large and medium length; and Chantenay are short with large shoulders. Nantes types, like Nelson and Bolero, have excellent eating quality and fast maturity and are often preferred by home gardeners. When choosing varieties, look for those with good resistance to alternaria and cercospora. If you are interested in storage, choose varieties bred for that purpose. Many different colored carrot varieties are also now available, including purple and yellow carrots.

Preparation and planting

Carrots grow best on deep, loose, well-drained

mineral or organic soils with good water-holding capacity and few physical obstructions, such as stones. Soils that crust easily after a rain are not suitable because the seedlings will have trouble breaking through the surface. Sowing radish seeds with carrots may help solve the emergence problem. The quickly germinating, sturdy radish seedlings break up the crust so the delicate carrot seedlings can get through. Carrots are also sensitive to compacted soil. Carrots grown in such soils may develop forked and stubbed roots; work soil deeply so roots can reach their full length. If you are determined to grow carrots in a heavy soil, you'll have better results with the shorter cultivars.

Care

Keep the soil moist until the seedlings are at least 1 inch high; then thin to 2 inches between plants. A uniform supply of water is necessary for good root growth. Reduce watering when carrots reach three-quarters of their mature size to lessen the chance of splitting. For long season varieties on light soils, side-dressing with nitrogen may be helpful for optimal growth and quality.

Major pests

Insects: Aster leafhoppers, wireworms, carrot weevils.

Diseases: Alternaria, cercospora, aster yellows.

Harvesting and storage

Harvest carrots while they are still small, no more than 1 to 1.5 inches in diameter. Depending on cultivar and sowing date, harvesting may begin as early as July and continue until the end of October. For best flavor, do not harvest fall carrots until after a good frost.

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