

How to grow parsnips

Parsnips (*Pastinaca sativa*)

Family: Apiaceae (Carrot)

Season: Cool

Ease of growing: Moderate

Fertility needs: Medium

Water needs: High

Common propagation: Seed

Seed facts

Germination temperatures: 35°F to 85°F

Germination time: 10 to 21 days

Viability: 1 year

Direct sow: April

Planning facts

Spacing: 2" to 3"

Plants per square foot: 9

Time to harvest: 100 to 120 days

General

Parsnips are an under-appreciated vegetable, but devotees insist that few dishes are better than parsnips steamed, sliced and served with butter. It has a sweet, nutty flavor that enhances soups and stews. Parsnips are a nutritious member of the carrot family, a source of vitamins B6 and C and potassium. Though a biennial, it is grown as an annual. Parsnips are one of the hardiest vegetables. In fact, flavor is enhanced by frost.

Preparation and planting

Like carrots, parsnips like a deep, well-drained soil. Seeds germinate best when soil temperatures are 50°F to 70°F. Even at these temperatures, seeds may take three weeks or more to germinate. Be careful not to let the soil dry out and crust during this period or the small seeds may have difficulty breaking through. Some gardeners sow radishes in the row as a marker crop and to help break soil crusting.

Care

Cultural requirements for parsnips are very similar to those of carrots. They require consistent moisture, but are relatively untroubled by insect and disease pests. Their longer growing period requires vigilance for weed management.

Major pests

Insects: Aster leafhoppers.

Diseases: Alternaria and Cercospora.

Harvesting and storage

Harvest roots when they reach 1 inch in diameter. Expect about 70 roots per 25-foot row. Any that aren't harvested in the fall can be mulched and overwintered for spring harvest. In the spring, harvest before tops begin sprouting.

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