

Easy Gardening...Carrots

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Carrots grow best in cool temperatures of early spring and late fall. Night temperatures of 55 degrees and day temperatures of 75 degrees are ideal for carrots. High temperatures cause poorly colored, low quality carrots. They will grow in some shade and do well in small gardens and flower beds.

Soil Preparation and Fertilization

Carrots do best in loose, sandy loam soils which are well drained. In heavy soils they mature slower and often the roots are rough and unattractive.

Clear the soil surface of rocks, trash and large pieces of plant material. Small, fine pieces of plant material can be turned under for soil enrichment.

Spade the soil 8-12 inches deep. Turn the soil completely over so all plant material is covered. Scatter 1 cup of complete fertilizer such as 10-20-10 on the soil for each 10 feet of row to be planted. Using a rake, work the fertilizer into the soil to a depth of 3-4 inches.

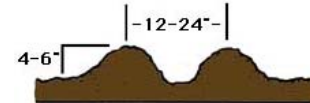


Figure 1. Ridges are very important in low, poorly drained areas. They allow the soil to drain and let air enter.



Figure 2

Smooth the soil and work it up into beds as shown. Beds allow good movement of air and water through the soil. Place carrot rows 1-2 feet apart. If ridges are farther apart, plant two rows of carrots on each ridge.

Planting

Begin planting carrots as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring. In South Texas plant carrots any time from July through February. In many South Texas areas carrots can be grown all winter. For a fall crop in other areas, plant in August.

Using a hoe handle or stick, make one or two rows 1/2-inch deep on top of each prepared ridge. Scatter 18-20 seeds per foot in the row. Since carrot seeds require 14-21 days to sprout, many gardeners mix a few radish seeds, which sprout quickly, with carrot seeds to mark the row. Cover the seeds lightly. Sprinkle the row with water often to prevent crusting or cover the seeds with vermiculite or sand. This is especially helpful for crops planted in hot summer months.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Thin carrot plants to 2 inches apart when tops are 4 inches high. Some carrots will be large enough to eat. Thin the carrots to 4 inches apart as they continue to grow. Overcrowding and rocky soils result in poor quality roots. If radishes were mixed with the carrots, pull and eat them as they mature.

Five to 10 feet of row per person should supply enough fresh carrots for table use. One foot of row will yield about 1 pound of carrots.

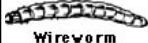

Varieties

- Danvers 126
- Nantes

After Planting

Keep carrots free of weeds, especially when they are small. Weeds use nutrients and moisture and cause reduced carrot yields. Scratch the soil lightly around the plants to prevent crusting. Water the plants as required to keep the soil moist to a depth of about 3 inches. Scatter 2 tablespoons of fertilizer per 10 feet of row beside the plants when the tops are about 4 inches high. Fertilize again when tops are 6-8 inches high if the tops become pale.

Insects

Name and description		Control
 Wireworm	1/2-to 1 1/2-inches long; yellow to white, dark head and tail; slender; feeds on root	Diazinon
 Cutworm	up to 1 1/4 inches long; dull gray, brown to black; striped or spotted, soft bodied, smooth; curls up when touched; cuts off young plants near soil level	Diazinon

Before using a pesticide read the label. Always follow cautions, warnings and directions.

Diseases

Carrots are troubled by some diseases. If leaf spots appear on plants, dust them with an approved fungicide. If a plant becomes yellow and stunted, remove it from the garden. If the roots have knots on them, your soil may have nematodes. Ask your county Extension agent or gardening assistant about disease control.

Harvesting

Carrots should be ready for harvest 70-80 days after planting. Pull them when the roots are 1-1 1/2 inches in diameter. Loosen the soil around the carrot with a spade to avoid breaking the carrot while pulling. To prevent roots from wilting after harvest, remove carrot tops and place them in the compost pile.

Wash carrots and store in the bottom of the refrigerator. Place them in a plastic bag for increased humidity. Carrots will keep several weeks with high humidity and a temperature near 32 degrees.

Serve carrots cooked or raw by themselves or in salads. They are an excellent source of Vitamin A and add color to a meal.

Clean-Up

Pull unused carrots and place in a compost pile or spade into the soil.

Hypertext markup by Tammy Kohlleppel, Gretchen Eagle and Dan Lineberger. <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/easygardening/carrot/carrot.html>