

# Carrot perfection



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Carrot cultivars vary in root color, shape, days to maturity and storage ability. Home gardeners should select a type that is suited to their soil conditions.

**Q**uestion: Carrots are so difficult to grow. Can you give me some tips for growing sweet, crunchy carrots in my home garden?

**A**nswer: The carrot, *Daucus carota*, is a biennial plant in the umbellifer family, Apiaceae. It is a root vegetable, typically orange in color; however, like a lot of other foods, carrots have migrated around the color chart in recent years.

Purple, black, red, white, and yellow cultivars exist, all of which are domesticated forms of the wild carrot.

*Daucus carota* is native to Europe and southwestern Asia. The plant was originally cultivated for its aromatic leaves and seeds rather than its roots. Some close relatives of the carrot are still grown for their leaves and seeds, such as parsley, cilantro, coriander, fennel, anise, dill and cumin.

Carrots will grow best in a sunny location. Even though the roots are growing underground, the foliage needs full sun for the carrot roots to grow quickly and develop their sugars.

Carrots prefer a loose, well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0 to



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7.0. Carrots will mature very slowly with rough roots if they are forced to grow in heavy soil. Rocks and clumps will cause the carrot roots to split and become deformed.

Growing carrots in raised beds with fluffy soil is the ideal situation. If your soil is not rich in organic matter, supplemental feeding will be necessary about two weeks after the carrot tops emerge. Any good quality organic vegetable fertilizer will do. Because they are grown for their roots, don't go overboard with nitrogen fertilizer, which mostly aids foliage growth.

Plant your carrot seeds in the spring. They may take as long as three weeks to sprout. Carrot seeds are tiny, making it difficult to plant them evenly. From seed to harvest typically takes 50-75 days.

Sprinkle the tiny carrot seeds 1 inch apart, 1/4 inch deep,

and cover lightly with soil. It's difficult to space carrot seeds evenly, so you will likely need to thin them out as they grow. Correctly spacing carrots is the key to harvesting a healthy crop, but it's not always easy and requires plenty of thinning.

When the seedlings are 1-2 inches tall, thin them out to be 3 inches apart. Use tiny snips for this task so you don't pull up nearby developing carrot roots. Carrots don't like to be transplanted or disturbed.

Don't let the soil dry out because it will form a hard crust that can hamper seed germination. To prevent this from happening, cover the seed with fine sand, potting soil or compost instead of soil.

Carrots should be watered deeply and frequently to keep the soil evenly moist. This provides for good color and root development, whereas uneven soil moisture can lead to poor production, as well as cracked roots, bitter flavor and woodiness.

Carrots can also be planted in July for a late fall and winter crop in the Umpqua Valley.

There are multiple carrot

varieties. Carrot cultivars vary in root color, shape, days to maturity, and storage ability. Home gardeners should select a type that is suited to their soil conditions.

For example, carrots with longer roots grow best in loose, sandy soil, while short-rooted types will do better in rocky or heavy soils. Some notable varieties include:

■ **Danvers's Half Long:** early, sweet, and easy growing

■ **Imperator:** a long variety that keeps its sweetness and crunch in storage

■ **Paris Market"/"Thumbelina:** plump, round, and bite-sized, ideal for containers

■ **Scarlet Nantes:** the classic seven-inch long carrot with a blunt tip

■ **Chantenay:** good in heavy soils, sweet and crisp, these carrots store well

■ **Yellowstone and Amarillo:** bright yellow, nine inches long imperator type

■ **Dragon, Atomic Red and Cosmic Purple:** purple carrots with orange flesh

■ **White Satin and Snow Man:** distinctly different, seven inches long with smooth white coloring  
Don't harvest your carrots

too early thinking you will get sweet baby carrots. Immature carrots will be bland because they have not had time to develop their full sweetness.

You can leave carrot plants in place over the winter. The carrot tops will die but the roots will continue gathering their sugar to survive the cold weather. Even if left in the ground into winter, the roots can still be quite delicious.

Harvest these carrots before the early spring arrives or they will start to form flowers.

Even experienced gardeners can be challenged to grow carrots that are long and sweet. But given well-drained and fluffy composted soil, favorable weather and plenty of water, there's no reason you can't grow sweet, crunchy carrots successfully.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*