

Carrot

Carrots grow easily in a small area, resist cold, and, if stored under moist, cool conditions, stay fresh up to four months. They also yield more fruit per square inch of garden soil than most other vegetables and are tasty cooked or raw.

Varieties

If you have deep, loose soil, grow some of the longer-rooted varieties. If you have clayey soil, stick to the stubbier crops such as 'Planet.' Try new varieties to find the ones that do well in your garden and appeal to your taste.

Planting

Prepare your bed well. The looser the soil, the better. If you have compacted soil, grow carrots in a raised bed. Get carrots into the ground as soon as you can work the soil in the spring. Carrot seeds are extremely fine and are difficult to sow evenly or in an uncrowded manner. Some gardeners mix the seed with sand or vermiculite to make sowing easier. Others use a saltshaker. Still others mix in radish seeds, which germinate faster and work as a good row marker. Carrot seeds can take up to three weeks to germinate. Keep them moist because uniform moisture at this stage is critical. If you can't watch your carrots closely, apply a ½-inch layer of mulch over the row.

Care

Thin carrots early by snipping off the ferns with a scissors. Or wait and pull up the larger carrots just as they reach edible stage. The smaller carrots then will have space to mature as the season progresses. Keep after weeds. Mulch works well around carrots to keep them free of weeds, but some weeds still will grow. Don't let the weeds get big. Otherwise, when you pull large weeds, you may pull up young carrots. Water frequently during dry spells. Carrots will be sweeter if grown rapidly.

Harvest

Start picking carrots as soon as they are large enough to eat. These young carrots are delicious, and picking them helps the other carrots thrive. Also, when carrots get large, they can be difficult to pull. Dig off to the side with a spade to harvest large bunches of carrots all at once. Store harvested carrots in sand, peat, or leaves for later use.