

Parsnip

Parsnips are an often-overlooked, but nutritious and good-tasting, vegetable. They have a sweet, nutty flavor that adds zest to any soup or stew. Try them cooked like carrots or mashed like potatoes, too.

Varieties

Three recommended varieties are 'All American,' 'Harris Model,' and 'Hollow Crown.'

Planting

Since parsnips can reach a depth of 15 inches, prepare a deep bed by loosening the soil with a spade or tiller. Remove all debris such as rocks, sticks, or large clumps of earth. Add lots of peat, compost, or rotted manure to the bed and mix in commercial fertilizer. Because parsnips take a long time to germinate, sow seeds as early in spring as possible. Interplant radishes to mark the rows. To prevent crusting, mix peat moss or dried grass clippings with the soil used to cover the seeds.

Care

Keep the soil moist at all times to prevent seedlings from drying out. Thin young plants to stand several inches apart, then mulch around them. Thin again later in the season to about 6 inches apart. Remove all weeds immediately to prevent competition for water and nutrients.

Harvest

Because the flavor of parsnips improves after several frosts, keep them in the ground until late fall. If you want to overwinter any plants, cover them with a thick layer of mulch. Dig all remaining parsnips in early spring. Dig parsnips with a spade or garden fork. Pulled parsnips sometimes break off underground. Harvested parsnips store well in cool temperatures in moist peat moss or sand.