

Radish

The foolproof summer radish reaches maturity within 20 to 30 days after planting, changing so fast you can almost watch it grow. It's nearly indestructible and can grow anywhere, from raised beds to flowerpots. Winter radishes take longer to mature, store well, and can be eaten raw or cooked.

Varieties

Favorite summer varieties include 'Cherry Belie,' 'Sparkler,' and 'White Icicle.' Good winter varieties are 'Black Spanish,' 'China Rose,' and 'White Chinese. "Easter Egg' produces different colors in every crop.

Planting

Sow seeds of summer varieties in early spring as soon as you can work the ground. Radishes like loose soil amended with organic matter and sprinkled with commercial fertilizer high in potassium and phosphorus. Radishes are such a quick growing crop that small, successive plantings make the most sense. Interplant radish seeds with slower maturing crops, such as carrots. The radishes will mark the location of the carrots, and, as you harvest the radishes, you will be thinning the young carrots automatically. Plant winter radishes so they will mature in the fall and be ready for storage before frost. In the North, plant in early to late July.

Care

For juicy, tender roots, force rapid growth in cool weather. Water the plants generously. Thin the larger radishes to give younger ones space. Mulch around plants to hinder weeds and keep the soil constantly moist.

If root maggots have been a problem, treat your soil with diazinon early in spring before planting. Flea beetles often riddle young leaves with holes, but do little damage to the edible roots. If you want, sprinkle the leaves with diatomaceous earth to discourage these pests.

Harvest

Because small radishes are tender and juicy and large radishes get woody and hot, pull radishes when they are no larger than a marble. Harvest winter radishes when they mature at the end of the season. Use a spading fork for monster varieties. Store radishes in moist peat, sawdust, or sand.