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How to Grow Carrots: The Complete Guide



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Botanical Name:	<i>Daucus carota</i> subsp. <i>sativus</i>
Plant Type:	Vegetable
Season:	Full Sun

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Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Carrots

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)
Last Updated: April 24, 2025



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Carrots are a cool-season crop grown in spring. This popular vegetable has a natural sweetness, especially when home-grown. Some gardeners find carrots tricky

tips and tricks on how to plant, grow, and harvest carrots.

About Carrots

The carrot (*Daucus carota* subsp. *sativus*) is a root vegetable in the umbellifer family. Today's cultivars are all domesticated forms of the wild carrot, *Daucus carota*, native to Europe and Southwestern Asia. The wild carrot has a more woodsy texture and is less palatable. They have a long history, dating from 3000 B.C. The orange-color carrot is relatively new to gardens and kitchens: It first appeared in the Netherlands in the 17th century. Carrots did not become popular in the United States until after World War I, when soldiers returning from Europe brought seeds and stories of having eaten and enjoyed them.

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The colorful roots are usually orange, but

low hues. Eaten raw or cooked, carrots are an excellent source of vitamins A, K, and B6 and also contain large quantities of beta-carotene and nutrients. The stems and leaves are rarely eaten, though they are edible.

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Carrots grown in the garden taste more flavorful, fresher, and juicier because the sugar that makes a carrot sweet begins to be replaced by fiber as it ages in grocery stores. Another reason to grow carrots in the garden is there are so many more varieties to try, from Belgian whites to Purple Dragon to Parisian heirlooms

Don't expect to get perfectly straight "grocery store" carrots in the garden, especially if your soil isn't loose, well-draining, and sandy or loamy. Your carrots will still taste better, whatever their shape!



Misshapen carrots can be caused by heavy, compact, overly enriched soil.

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PLANTING

Carrots prefer sunny locations (6 to 10 hours of sun). The soil itself should be free-draining; this is one of the few crops benefiting from sandier soils. You don't want your soil to be too rich either, or the carrots can't reach down!

If your garden is made of rugged, clay soil, grow carrots in containers or raised beds at least 8 inches to 12 inches high. See our tips on container gardening below!

When to Plant Carrots

- Carrot seeds can be sown about 2 to 3 weeks before the last spring frost date. [Find your local frost dates here.](#) Ideally, you want the soil to have dried out and warmed up a little after

- Seeds germinate after the soil temperature is at least 40° and germinate best at 55°–65°F, not exceeding 75°F. High summer temperatures reduce growth, decrease quality, and cause bitter or off-flavors to develop.
- For a fall harvest, sow seeds in mid- to late summer—starting about 10 weeks before your first fall frost.

How to Plant Carrots

- Prepare the site by tilling to a depth of 10 inches. We recommend double-digging to be certain. Make sure there are no rocks, stones, or even soil clumps. Amend soil with compost and 6 inches of sandy topsoil if your soil isn't loose and airy.
- We recommend sowing seeds directly in the garden (or wherever you plan to grow them) rather than transplanting. Carrots do not like to have their roots disturbed.
- Sow 1/4 inch deep, 2 to 3 inches apart in rows 1 foot apart.

• **Tip:** Try to distribute seeds in an

tiny, and it's very easy to sow them too thickly. If you've not got the steadiest hand, then a simple tip is to mix the seeds with fine sand to spread the seeds out. You can then sow pinches of your sand-seed mix instead. Then, just cover the seeds over.

- Keep the soil moist with frequent, shallow watering. For small carrot seeds to germinate, the soil mustn't form a hard crust on top; covered with a layer of fine sand, vermiculite, or compost to prevent a crust from forming. (If you put your finger in the ground, it should be moist, but not wet, to the middle knuckle.)
- Carrots are sometimes slow to germinate. They require 14–21 days to emerge, so don't panic if your carrots don't appear immediately!
- Planting radishes with carrots helps minimize the crusting problem and helps you keep track of where the carrot seeds were planted. Sow quick-germinating radish seeds between carrot rows. The radishes will grow

ally start to grow, they can be harvested.

- For a continued harvest, plant carrots every 4 weeks through midsummer.

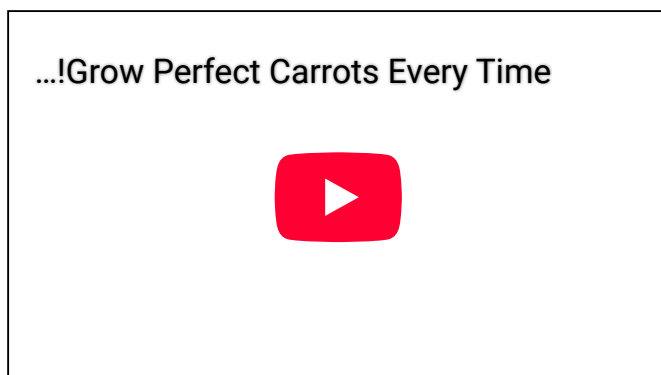
Carrots in Containers

Growing carrots in pots is a great way to customize the perfect growing medium and avoid pests like carrot flies. Pots must be at least 10 to 12 inches deep and wide.

- A great low-fertility mix is one part sand and one part potting mix.
- Sow seeds very thinly over the top of a filled pot and then cover them with just a touch more of the mix.
- Water well, label, and set into a sunny position.
- Keep everything moist because, unlike carrots in the ground, carrots in containers will be entirely dependent on you for all their needs.
- Once the seedlings are up, thin them to a couple of inches apart. Then harvest them once they've reached finger size.

**Check out this video to learn how to
plant carrots in the ground and
in containers!**

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GROWING

- Gently mulch carrots to retain moisture, speed germination, and block the sun from hitting the roots directly.
- When seedlings are an inch tall with 3

scissors instead of pulling them out to prevent damage to the fragile roots of the remaining plants.

- Ensure carrots receive 1 inch of water per week, either through rain or watering; do not overwater carrots.
- Weed diligently as carrots do not like struggling against weeds, but be careful not to disturb the young carrots' roots while doing so.
- Fertilize 5 to 6 weeks after sowing (We recommend a low-nitrogen fertilizer as excess nitrogen in the soil promotes top, or foliage, growth—not roots.).

[Learn more about how and when to fertilize your vegetables.](#)

Growing Carrots in Containers

You can also grow carrots in containers! It is important to grow carrots in a container that is deep enough for them at maturity. For baby or dwarf carrots, a 6- to 8-inch-deep container is needed. Standard carrots need a depth of at least 12 inches, if necessary, to accommodate a

spring; seeds can be sown 2 to 3 weeks before the last spring frost.

Prepare a loose, well-draining potting mix with a portion of compost or organic matter. Add a handful of bonemeal; it contains phosphorus, which benefits root crops. Also, add low-nitrogen fertilizer, per the package directions, based on the container size. Water the soil evenly to moisten. Sow the seeds about a 1/2 inch apart and 1/4 inch deep. (Carrot seeds are tiny and thus difficult to drop individually; pelleted seeds or seed-taped ones are good alternative means.) Cover with a very light sprinkling of soil. Water gently (a handheld pump container is advised instead of a hose, the water force from which can displace the cover soil and seeds).

Water regularly to keep the soil moist. Container soils tend to dry relatively quickly. Dry soil can promote forking (misshapen roots).

When carrot tops are 2 to 3 inches tall

to cut off the tops, rather than pulling seedlings and disturbing the roots. Apply a low-nitrogen fertilizer every 3 to 4 weeks, per the package directions for the size of the container.

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TYPES

Carrots come in a rainbow of colors, sizes, and shapes.

- **‘Bolero’**: slightly tapered; 7 to 8 inches; resists most leaf pests and blights
- **‘Danvers’**: classic heirloom; 6 to 8 inches long, that tapers at the end and has a rich, dark orange color; suited to

- **‘Little Finger’**: heirloom; a small Nantes type of carrot only 4 inches long and one inch thick; good for containers
- **‘Nantes’**: cylindrical (not tapered); 6 to 7 inches; exceptionally sweet; crisp texture
- **‘Thumberline’**: heirloom; round carrot, good for clumpy or clay soil and containers
- For unusual colors, try heirloom **‘Red Cored Chantenay’** and bright **‘Solar Yellow’**
- **‘Adelaide’**: true baby carrot; miniature Nantes type (cylindrical, smooth, nearly same diameter from end to end; blunt, not pointed tip); mature at 3 to 4 inches
- **‘Bambino’**: harvest at 4 inches; dwarf tops; cylindrical, blunt roots; good for canning and pickling
- **‘Little Finger’**: heirloom; miniature Nantes type; 3 to 4 inches long; good for canning and pickling
- **‘Romance’**: Nantes type; 6 to 7 inches long, with tapered root; orange roots brighten after washing

- **Thumbelina**: heirloom; 1- to 2-inch rounds; needs no peeling
- **'Touchon'**: heirloom; considered best of the Nantes type; quick to mature; 6 inches long



HARVESTING

How and When to Harvest Carrots

How do you know when your carrots are ready? Have a little root around and check the approximate width of the roots by looking at the neck of the root. The first roots should be ready as soon as 2 months from sowing.

— — — — —

about as wide as your thumb or at least $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch in diameter.

- Younger and shallower roots should come away easily enough simply by gripping them firmly at the base of the foliage. It often helps to push down on the root first and then twist it as you gently pull upwards.
- Larger, longer roots—particularly those of maincrop carrots that are sown for winter eating—may need to be eased up with the help of a fork.
- Harvest in stages—or as roots reach full size. In this way, you'll stagger your harvest over many weeks.
- If you're growing carrots in the spring and early summer, harvest before daily temperatures get too hot, as the heat can cause carrot roots to grow fibrous.
- If you are harvesting in the fall, carrots taste much better after one or more frosts. (A frost encourages the plant to start storing energy—sugars—in its root for later use.) Following the first hard frost in the fall, cover carrot tops with an 18-inch layer of shredded leaves to preserve them for

- **Note:** Carrots are biennials. If you fail to harvest and leave the carrots in the ground, the tops will flower and produce seeds next year.



Scrub off the dirt and remove the tops before storing carrots!

How Do You Store Fresh Carrots?

- To store freshly harvested carrots, twist or cut off all but 1/2 inch of the tops, scrub off any dirt under cold running water, and air-dry. Seal in airtight plastic bags and refrigerate. If you simply put fresh carrots in the refrigerator, they'll go limp in a few hours.
- You may leave mature carrots in the soil for temporary storage if the ground will not freeze and pests aren't a problem.

dry area.

WIT AND WISDOM

- Not all carrots are orange; varieties vary in color from purple to white, and some are resistant to diseases and pests.
- Long-lasting carrots are rich in sugar, and a great source of vitamins and carotene.
- The Irish called carrots “underground honey” due to the sweetness of these root vegetables.
- Carrots were the first vegetable to be canned commercially. [Learn how to can carrots yourself!](#)
- Wild carrot, aka Queen Anne’s lace, is native to Europe and Asia and is an invasive species in North America. Its long taproots smell like carrots.
- Feathery green carrot tops were once used to decorate women’s hats and sleeves.

PESTS/DISEASES

Carrot Pests and Diseases

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
Aster Yellow Disease	Bacteria	Shortened and discolored carrot tops and thin, hairy roots; bitter taste	Spread by pests as they feed from plant to plant. Keep weeds down and invest in a control plan for pests such as leafhoppers. This disease has the ability to overwinter.
Black (Itersonilia) canker	Fungus	Shallow, reddish brown/purple/black cankers form on crown and/or shoulder of carrots; small, orange-brown spots on leaves may have green halos; flowers rot	Choose resistant varieties; cover shoulders of carrots with soil; rotate crops
Carrot rust flies	Insect	Wilted/stunted plants; tunnels with rust-color excrement in roots of carrot-family crops; root rot	Monitor adults with yellow sticky traps; use row covers; add native plants to invite beneficial insects; destroy crop residue; rotate crops

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
			attract beneficial insects
Leafhoppers	Insect	White shed skins on leaf undersides (from nymph molting); stippling (many tiny spots) on leaves; “hopperburn” (leaves yellow/brown, curled, or stunted); reduced yield	Knock nymphs off leaf undersides with strong spray of water; use row covers; monitor adults with yellow sticky traps; weed; destroy crop residue
Root-knot nematodes	Insect	Typically, roots “knotty” or galled; plants stunted/yellow/wilted; roots forked/pimpled	Destroy crop residue, including roots; choose resistant varieties; solarize soil; add aged manure/compost; disinfect tools; till in autumn; rotate crops
Wireworms	Insect	Seeds hollowed; seedlings severed; stunting/wilting; roots eaten; tubers/ bulbs bored	Trap by digging 2- to 4-inch-deep holes every 3 to 10 feet, fill with mix of germinating beans/corn/peas or potato sections as bait, cover with

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
			worms; sow seeds in warm soil for quick germination; provide good drainage; remove plant debris; rotate crops

RECIPES

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CARROT-ZUCCHINI MUFFINS

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CARROT CUPCAKES WITH CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

THE BEST-EVER CARROT CAKE

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VEGETABLES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Anne (not verified)1 week 4 days ago

I always thought Queen Anne's Lace was native to the usa; good pollinators tho' ty~

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REPLY

Mack gerlack (not verified)11 months 3 weeks ago

Hi. I live here in Georgia. Southwest corner. I was told plant carrots in the winter months. I got seed pods trays that can start the seeds. I was wondering if I can transplant the plants in the ground in February? We have hot temperature in May in the 90's. Trying to the best time. Also like to plant onions too. Both of them are cold weather plants for here .

REPLY

Been planting and harvesting carrots for decades. One of my fav's. I plant the Danvers variety, the soil isn't as much of an issue. I till and sift as best as I can and plant. When they start coming up, I use grass clippings between the rows and gently drop dry clippings over and around the carrots. I do enjoy a warm June day to thin and weed carrots. Its a bit of a task but I actually look forward to dropping all my cares and bask in the sun. I harvest sparingly to thin some out. In November, just as the ground here in S. NH is beginning to freeze, I fill large plastic trash bags full of leaves and place them right over the rows, covering as much of the crop as I can. This is a great insulator, push the snow aside and I have carrots until March. The ground under the leaves is soft and carrots come out easily. Works great for parsnips too. Problem is there is now more snow to remove!

REPLY

David Smith (not verified) 1 year 7 months

ago

Love your website and valuable information.

2 questions - I just planted carrots

tilizer is the best to use?

thank you

REPLY

Brian Otie (not verified) 1 year 5

months ago

Love your activities

REPLY

The Editors 1 year 7 months ago

Hi, David!

You will want to gently [mulch](#) carrots to retain moisture, speed germination, and block the sun from hitting the roots directly.

Fertilize 5 to 6 weeks after sowing. (We recommend a low-nitrogen fertilizer as excess nitrogen in the soil promotes top, or foliage, growth—not roots.)

REPLY

Mlebu (not verified) 1 year 9 months ago

nice info

REPLY

jr (not verified) 2 years 1 month ago

I live in AB. I have been treated with yaya carrots that extremely sweet -- sweeter than I have ever eaten. I bought this variety last year, sent several packets around Canada, telling friends to: be prepared to fall in love again ... with carrots. What a disappointment "all" of us had. The ones we grew looked great and did have decent flavour, but none of the over-the-top sweetness of the carrots grown in central Alberta. what did we all do wrong?

REPLY

Elina (not verified) 1 year 4 months

ago

at the maturity date on the seed package, and count back that many days from when you start getting frosts in your area, and that would be the date to plant the carrots. Big types of carrots should be planted for fall/early winter harvest, and not in the spring for summer harvest.

REPLY

Anne Anderson (not verified) 2 years 1

month ago

Thank you for this very informative, delightfully presented tutorial on growing carrots! I'm an ex-pat (Scotland) living in New England, 83 years young, grown several greens, as well as flowers in pots, in my retirement community, but never tried carrots. This is the year! And all thanks to that young man who has explained it so succinctly and with humor. All blessings!

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

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