



## Roots: So Right for Winter Eating!

Carrots, radishes, turnips, rutabagas, parsnips, celeriac, onions, beets, salsify ... the list goes on. Technically the foods we call roots are not all roots. Carrots, beets, turnips, and parsnips are roots, but potatoes are tubers (thickened underground stems), and onions are bulbs—a botanical distinction, though not one that we think about when eating a soul-nourishing winter stew.

All of these food crops are storage units for the nutrients that give the plant the energy it needs to grow and produce seeds. In most cases this happens in year two of the plant's life cycle. Because roots absorb the soil's nutrients, they offer considerable health benefits. They are laden with vitamins and fiber, antioxidants and essential minerals.



Roasted roots are a delicious complement to any winter meal.

Farmers' markets are loaded with root options when weather gets cool. Pick some up and try one or more of these simple preparation methods. Next year, you'll be tempted to grow your own!

- Peel and trim a **variety of root vegetables**, and toss them with olive oil in a large baking dish. Season with salt and pepper, and herbs of your choosing, and bake in a 400° oven for about 45 minutes.
- Sauté an onion and a couple of celery stalks in butter until tender. Add two or three garlic cloves and cook for a minute or two more, then add peeled and cubed root vegetables (such as **turnips, celeriac, carrots, and parsnip**) and cover with water. Simmer until the roots are tender, and puree to make a creamy soup. Add liquid to thin if necessary, and season with herbs, salt and pepper, and lemon juice.
- Slice peeled **parsnips** (or carrots, or rutabagas) into thin pieces and sauté in butter or oil until they begin to brown. Season with salt and pepper and toss with parsley.
- Grate **beets** coarsely, then toss them in melted butter with salt and pepper to taste. Add a small amount of water (just enough to add steam), and cover the pan. Cook for about five minutes until tender, and season with fresh herbs and balsamic vinegar.

## Five easy-from-seed roots



### Carrots

The trick with carrots is to spend time on soil preparation. Loosen soil to about 10 inches in depth, removing clods and rocks. Seeds can be sown from spring through midsummer in most regions, directly on the soil about an inch apart. Cover them with vermiculite, sifted compost, or another loose medium, and keep the seedbed consistently moist until they germinate. Thin seedlings to 2 to 4 inches apart when they are a couple inches tall.

### Beets

Beets are happiest in sandy or loamy soil. Loosen the soil, as for carrots, and sow seeds at least an inch apart. Beet seeds are actually dried fruit husks, with each containing several true seeds. Thinning is essential for good growth, so snip off all but the strongest seedling at the soil level after germination. Follow this up in a couple weeks by thinning plants to stand about two inches apart. Repeat two weeks later so your beets will be four inches apart. Eat your thinnings; young roots and greens are delectable!

### Onions

The easiest onions to grow from seed are bunching onions, or scallions. In fact, these are ideal for containers, where they won't need to compete with weeds. In a large container, scallions can co-exist nicely with another edible, such as a kale plant. To do this spring-planted combination, center a kale seedling in a container that is at least 18 inches in diameter, and broadcast the onion seeds along the perimeter, so that the seeds fall about an inch apart. No thinning is necessary; just harvest the green onions throughout the summer as they become large enough to suit your purposes.

### Parsnips

Buy parsnip seed every year, as it does not keep well. The fresher your seed is, the better the results. Seeds can take as long as a month to germinate, so if your seed is past its prime, you'll miss out on the window to plant! Loosen the soil to a depth of at least a foot for parsnips, and time your sowing in spring or early summer so that roots will reach maturity at about the time of the first fall frost. In mild winter areas, plant seeds in fall. Keep soil evenly moist, and then wait. When seedlings reach about 6 inches in height, thin them to about 4 inches, and mulch to suppress weeds. Parsnips get sweeter with frost, and can even be dug in spring, before the roots sprout new leaves.

### Turnips

Turnips are in the cabbage family and, like other family members, they like it cool. Sow seed in mid spring and again in late summer where summers get hot. If summers are not too hot, seed can be sown in succession throughout the summer. Some types, particularly the small salad turnips that are best when harvested at about 2 inches in diameter, don't even need thinning if you take care to sow seeds about an inch apart. Larger turnips should be thinned to stand about 4 inches apart. Eat the greens, they're delicious! As with parsnips, they can be harvested throughout the fall.

*But ... don't stop with the common roots!*

Try celeriac, rutabaga, and the others that have been discovered by chefs around the country for tastes and textures that make satisfying winter treats.