



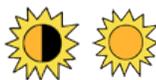
Carrot seeds germinate slowly, and seedlings need pampering for their first 3 to 4 weeks. But if your plants get a good start, it is almost guaranteed that you'll have a healthy harvest of sweet roots in a couple of months. Let the condition of your soil guide you in choosing the best variety for your garden: if your soil is heavy and dense, choose a short variety, such as Nantes, or a ball-type carrot. Danvers and Chantenay types can also yield well in moderately heavy soils. In loose, loamy soils, any variety will produce—provided that you take good care of your young seedlings.

1. Prepare. Loosen soil to a depth of about 12 inches using a shovel or tiller. Remove rocks, which may cause your carrots to fork or twist. Mix in some compost or slow-release fertilizer to provide plants with nutrients. Then rake the soil smooth, removing any large clumps.

2. Plant. Seed can be sown from early spring through midsummer in many parts of the country. In warm-winter regions, plant in late summer or winter. Sprinkle seeds in a wide row, so that they fall about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch apart. Full sun is best, but carrots can tolerate light shade. Cover seeds lightly with a material that will not crust, such as vermiculite, sifted compost, or potting soil, and keep them evenly moist until they germinate – which can take up to 3 weeks.

3. Grow. Water soil to keep it moist, and pull weeds that sprout nearby. When seedlings are about 2 inches tall, thin tightly spaced clumps of seedlings so that remaining plants stand 1 to 2 inches apart. As roots begin to mature, harvest some baby carrots, allowing others to grow to full size. Mulch around the roots with straw to control weeds and conserve soil moisture. Carrots can be left in the ground even after a frost. Insulate them with a thick layer of straw mulch and harvest through the fall, until the ground freezes.

4. Enjoy. Scrub the roots well to remove soil; peel, if desired. Carrots of all colors are brimming with beta-carotene (an orange pigment used by the body to create vitamin A) whether eaten raw, or cooked. Carrots can be shredded, chopped, juiced, roasted, grilled, or stir-fried, and they boost the nutritional value of soups, stews, and salads.



AT A GLANCE

Exposure: Full sun to light shade

Planting time: 4 weeks before the final frost, and throughout the spring through midsummer. In warm-winter regions, plant in late summer or winter.

Planting depth: 1/4 inch deep

Spacing in row: Sow $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch apart; thin to 1-2 inches apart when seedlings are 2 inches tall.

Time to harvest: 55-80 days, depending on variety.



Ball-type and mini carrots, such as 'Romeo' and 'Little Finger' grow well in containers.