

GROWING ROOT CROPS

Carrots, beets, parsnips, radishes, turnips, onions, and rutabagas are the most commonly grown root crops. They all have similar cultural requirements and grow best in cool weather. Since they are hardy, they may be planted early in the spring, and left in the garden until fall. In addition, leaves of beets, turnips, and radishes can be used as cooked greens and can be harvested while the plants are young.

Except for turnips and rutabagas, plant root crops in late March to early April. The time to plant turnips and rutabagas is in June or July, for a fall crop.

Root crops need at least 8 hours of sunlight a day and need well drained soil for best growth. Work peat, compost, and rotted manure into heavy soils to improve drainage. Remove stones and other objects in the soil that may deform or prevent root crops from forming properly. Always remember to take a soil sample for pH and nutrient analysis and apply fertilizer recommended in the soil test.

When plants are several inches tall, thin them out to make room for the best ones to grow larger. The entire seedling (leaf, stem, and root) that has been taken out can be used in salads or stir fry. Water plants weekly if it does not rain.

Carrots are available in several sizes and colors. There are short varieties that have fewer problems growing in heavy soils. Many varieties mature in about 100 days.

If you are planning to store **onions** for a long time, grow them from seed. Otherwise, onion sets or transplants will do well. Onions from seed usually mature in 110 days. Bunching and green onions mature in about 65 days.

Radishes mature in about 25 days. For a longer season, plant radishes every few weeks. **Turnips and beets** have similar requirements and both mature in about 50 days. There are varieties for **rutabagas** that mature in about 90 days.

See catalogs and garden centers for all the varieties of root crops. Look for specific maturity dates for each crop, and root crop characteristics such as color and average size when choosing plants and seeds.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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