

Celebrate the humble carrot by growing your own delicious crop of these sweet tasty roots

This year it's the turn of the unassuming carrot to be in focus across the gardening industry. It's the Year of the Carrot and these fascinating roots are under the spotlight.



If you've never eaten homegrown carrots you are missing a treat. Freshly pulled carrots have a wonderful, rich flavour that surpasses anything else carrot-y that you have ever tasted. The slightly sweet, earthy taste is perfect for adding a crisp, crunchy texture to salads and coleslaws when used raw, or add baby carrots to casseroles and stews. You can enhance the carrot flavour by roasting them whole in their skins, when they can be used to transform a wide range of menus, from humus to eastern inspired creations. And don't forget the ubiquitous carrot cake. You can even spiralize carrots as a great low calorie alternative to spaghetti and pasta.

You don't need an allotment or large garden to grow carrots. Anyone can grow these amazing, easy to grow roots in gardens large and

small. They can even be grown in pots and containers. What's more carrots have amazing foliage and since the plants are biennials, if you leave a few roots in the ground at the end of the season, they will go on to flower in their second year and create a fantastic source of food for pollinators too.

NOT JUST ORANGE

If you thought all carrots were orange, think again. Ancient carrots were creamy white and these days, if you choose, you can grow purple, yellow, white, cream and rich orange roots for your menus. You can also grow round carrots, short dumpy carrots or carrots so large each one is fit for a feast; they come in all shapes and sizes and can often grow in curious shapes as the roots intertwine together. Take a look at the range in the garden centre

and you will find a wide range of delicious varieties that you can grow.

FOOD FOR POLLINATORS

You might not realise that carrot plants will flower, but if you leave a few roots to grow into next season they will flower and set seed. The flat umbel flower heads are a magnet for pollinators especially solitary bees and hoverflies that use them as landing pads where they can feed on many flowers in one place. The flowers are rich in nectar and also produce pollen, bearing male and female flowers on the same umbel. The flowers are white and a striking addition to the garden, attracting a range of beneficial insects that will fertilise your other plants including other fruit and veg that need to be pollinated.

Step by Step

Follow the instructions on the seed packet for the variety you have chosen to grow.

1. Sow carrot seed thinly in shallow trenches about 6-8mm deep, in sandy or well tilled soil. Mix the seed with fine white sand to dilute it and sprinkle along the seed drill. Cover over lightly with soil or compost. In containers sow thinly on the compost surface and cover over with 3-4mm of fine seed compost.
2. Keep the area moist but not wet. Carrot seed is slow to germinate and can take from 7-21 days. Keep the area free from weeds.
3. Sow short rows every 1-2 weeks to extend the season.
4. As the plants start to mature, remove any that are crowding the others or look like they might be weaker, leaving individual plants room to grow. Carrots will start to mature after 8-10 weeks and can then be gently pulled out and eaten as required.



YEAR OF THE
carrot

SOIL

You can leave most carrots in the ground until you want to harvest them ensuring the freshest tastiest crop possible. For the best results growing in the ground you need a stone free soil that is well draining. A sandy soil is ideal. If carrot root fly is a problem in your area (ask around) then choose a resistant variety or sow your carrots late at the end of May to avoid its lifecycle. Alternatively protect your carrot plants with a fine mesh cover that will prevent the carrot flies reaching your plants and laying their eggs.

SPACE

If you are short on space grow short dumpy varieties in deep containers or growing bags. Sow them en masse and then as they start to mature thin them out, you can use the thinnings in salads. If you've got room for a row or two choose a main crop variety that will mature into the sweetest carrots you've ever tasted. Roast them whole or in generous chunks to preserve the sweetness.



MANY VARIETIES

Easy 2 grow

You won't normally see carrot plants for sale, it's far better to sow them in situ where you want them to grow rather than trying to transplant them or move them. The seed is small so it's easy to sow them too thickly. You can mix the seed with dry fine sand to spread the seeds out as you sow and to highlight where you have sown them. If they germinate too thickly let them grow for a few weeks and simply carefully remove some of them to prevent overcrowding.



GROWING CARROTS

- Sow them thinly into large containers or pots filled with a quality multi-purpose compost. Choose an organic compost and you can grow organic carrots with even more inherent value.
- You can see the tops of the roots start to swell at the soil surface. Keep an eye on them and cover the shoulders to prevent them from growing green.
- Carrots are hardy and can be sown in the ground or containers from February onwards.
- Choose an early maturing variety for an early sowing. Main crop carrots are sown in May and will be ready to harvest in the autumn.

