

# CARROT

Gardening tips provided by  
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

## Overview

Carrot, *Daucus carota* var. *sativas*, is a cool season vegetable and is related to parsley, celery, dill, and anise. The carrot has not always been orange. During the 14th century, white, purple, and yellow carrots were imported to southern Europe where red and purple carrots were already being cultivated. Dutch agricultural scientists wanted to breed a carrot that was less bitter than the yellow varieties. This led to the orange carrot, which was named the royal vegetable in tribute of the House of Orange. The carrot is rich in vitamin A.

## Choosing Varieties

There are many varieties of carrots that are characterized by the shape of their roots. Baby or mini carrots can come in different shapes, but are small in size. Chantenay carrots have thick crowns and a stocky build with blunt tips. They hold their shape better in soils with more clay than other carrots. Danvers carrots are similar in shape to the Chantenay but are longer. Emperor carrots look like the typical grocery-store carrot that is long and tapered. Nantes carrots have long tapered roots with blunt ends and have a sweet flavor. A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

### Baby

- Little Finger (sweet and crisp)

### Chantenay

- Chantenay Red Core (very sweet)

### Imperator

- Atomic Red (high in lycopene, good cooked)
- Sugarsnax 54 (sweet, high in beta-carotene)

### Nantes

- Bolero (fall harvest, stores well)

It is recommended to try a few varieties to determine overall plant performance and personal preference.

## Planting Tips

The carrot is a cool season vegetable that can withstand a light frost. It can be spring or fall planted. Carrots need



good soil drainage and 8-9 inches of loosened fine soil for formation of high-quality roots, which can be accomplished by planting in raised beds or rows. Addition of a significant amount of sand or compost can improve formation of the carrot root.

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in early April in the spring or in late summer, typically early August for a fall crop. Seeds should be planted no more than a ½ inch deep in rows about 1 foot apart or 8-10 inches apart in a bed.

Carrot seeds produce tiny seedlings that are not able to push through a crusted soil. To remedy this, the row can be mulched with sawdust or grass clippings after planting and kept moist, or carrots can be interplanted with radishes. The radishes germinate first, breaking up the soil for the carrots.

Once the plants are 2-4 inches tall, they should be thinned for a final spacing of no less than 2 inches by pulling plants or clipping foliage to the ground. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on the seed packet.

## Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Carrots should be planted in well-drained, loose soils without stones and other debris and would benefit from the addition of nutrients either in the form of a complete fertilizer or aged compost. Carrots should be given enough water to prevent wilting without waterlogging the soil.

The maggot stage of the carrot fly can damage carrot roots by tunneling into them, leaving them inedible. Sowing resistant varieties is recommended as well as companion planting with sage, rosemary, or onions, which have been known to reduce carrot fly attacks.

## Harvesting

Carrots should be harvested when they are at least ½ inch in

diameter. They will continue to grow if left in the ground. A fall crop of carrots may be left in the ground until a hard frost. Fall-cropped carrots can be stored in boxes of sand in a cool place. Before storing, the foliage should be clipped within 1 inch of the root.

### **Seed Sources**

Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Johnny's Selected Seeds (1-877-564-6697, johnnyseeds.com) and Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (1-417-924-8917, rareseeds.com) are two companies that sell carrot varieties.

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