

How to Grow Carrots

Introduction:

Carrots are quite easy and straightforward to grow from seed. There are many different varieties to choose from which come in various colours and shapes ranging from cylindrical, stump rooted and long rooted types. There are both early varieties which can be sown in the spring and main-crop varieties for sowing from late spring through until mid-summer. The later can be harvested almost all the year round. Earlies can be eaten after around 10-12 weeks whereas main-crop need some 16 weeks to mature and will store throughout the winter. The seed catalogue provides excellent information on all types of carrots including colour, shape and both earlies and mid-summer varieties. For the most reliable varieties, look for those with an RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM), which means they have performed well in RHS growing trials.

Cultivation:

Carrots like sun, light and a fairly deep, fertile and well drained soil; the sandier the better. Prior to sowing the ground should be dug over removing any weeds, preferably riddled to remove and stones and lumps of soil as these could cause forking and a general balanced fertiliser added. If the soil is heavy clay type or particularly stony then consider growing cylindrical varieties or sowing in containers or raised beds. If employing a crop rotation system then soil that has been heavily manured over a previous year e.g for potatoes could also cause forking and branching.

Sow the seeds very thinly in a shallow drill around half an inch(1-2cm) deep in rows some six inches(15cm) apart. Cover thinly with sharp sand. Seeds can be slow to germinate and when of a suitable size thin the seedlings to between 2-3 inches(5 -8cm) apart. Small carrots from a final thinning are delicious and can be eaten raw in salads.

If growing in containers or raised beds then it is advisable to mix good multi-purpose compost and sharp sand in the ratio 50:50. Seeds can be then scattered on the surface and thinned later.

For an early crop they can be grown undercover either in cloches, cold frames or the greenhouse/poly tunnel.

Pests and Problems:

Carrots can suffer from a number of problems including green top, aphids, forking and splitting but by far the worst is carrot fly.

The main pests are Carrot fly and Willow aphid. Carrot fly is a small black bodied fly whose large feed on the roots of carrots using them to rot. Once the carrot has been attacked there is no remedy. There are number of actions one can take to avoid attacks but prevention is the

best cure. Sow thinly and avoid crushing the foliage when thinning as this will attract the fly. Surround the bed with a barrier approx 60cm (2ft) high which excludes low-flying females alternatively cover the bed with environmesh.

The signs of Willow aphid are similar to that of Carrot fly with the foliage turning a coppery red colour. Whilst there is no damage to the root but once attacked by Willow aphids the plants seldom recover.

As with most vegetables greenfly aphids are attracted to the soft tips of plants and leaves.

Growing Carrots for our Annual Show

The classes for carrots in our Annual Show call for either stump or long pointed varieties. Whilst the method of cultivation differs slightly from the above the following methods can be easily used for general cultivation and especially when the ground is stony or comprised of clay.

Stump Rooted. Stump rooted carrots have taproots which, when mature, develop a definite stump or blunt end with the small taproot. Whilst there are many different varieties the variety 'Sweet Candle' is presently extremely popular for show. Each dish should contain one cultivar/variety. The exhibition value of points is dependent upon the difficulty of producing a perfect dish. The maximum points for a dish of Stump rooted carrots is 18pts; these are divided into the following condition 5pts, uniformity 4pts, size 2pts, shape 4pts, and colour 3pts. Well grown specimens should be fresh, firm, clean and smooth with no evidence of disease or pest damage.



Stump rooted carrots are best grown in raised beds, filled with sharp sand in which holes have been made using a downpipes. These are filled with sifted compost (Bloom and Magic). Sweet Candle can take between 22/24 weeks to form a stump end. Sow 3/4 seed to each borehole and reduce to one plant after approx one month. Protect against carrot root fly with environmesh.

Long Pointed. Long pointed carrots have long tap roots which tapers over its length to a fine root. Whilst there are seeds bred especially for exhibition, varieties such as James Scarlet Intermediate and the St Valery types are good for shows. Each dish should contain one cultivar/variety. The exhibition value of points is dependent upon the difficulty of producing a perfect dish. The maximum points for a dish of Long Pointed carrots is 20pts; these are divided into the following condition 5pts, uniformity 4pts, size 4pts, shape 4pts, and colour 3pts. Well grown specimens should be fresh, firm, straight, long and clean with no signs of pest damage, splitting or the greening of the shoulders.

Long pointed carrots can have roots up to a metre in length. To achieve that length they normally grown in downpipes or deep containers using a similar method to that above but to

get really long carrots the boreholes should be around 1.2 metres deep. Carrots should be sown around 21/22 weeks prior to the show.

References:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/carrots/grow-your-own>

<https://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/carrots-growing/>

<https://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable-show/growing-carrots-show-long-rooted/>

<https://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable-show/growing-carrots-stump-rooted-preparation/>