

# Growing Your Own

## A beginner's guide to gardening

# Carrots

**C**arrots are a sweet and tasty cool-season vegetable. They have a lot of vitamin A, which is good for your eyes. Also, pulling fresh carrots out of the ground is always fun for kids—and adults.

## Varieties

Carrot varieties are split into several groups that describe their shape. The part you eat is the root. Nantes types are shaped like little sausages, straight and blunt-ended. There are many good Nantes varieties:

- **Bolero** has thick roots that grow seven to eight inches long. They taste good fresh and after storage. It is a good type to grow in the fall and store over the winter.
- **Little Finger** is a baby-type carrot with sweet, orange, three-to-six-inch roots.
- **Mokum** is an early carrot that grows slender pencil-like roots that are five to six inches long. It is known to keep its sweet flavor even in the heat of summer.
- **Napoli** is an early carrot that can also be grown as a fall crop. It can grow up to seven inches long.
- **Yaya** is an early-season carrot with mild, crisp, and juicy five-to-six-inch roots.



**Little Finger**

*Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Co./  
rareseeds.com*



**Mokum**

*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



**Napoli**

*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



**Yaya**

*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



**Bolero**

*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



**Purple Haze**  
*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



**Sugarsnax**  
*Johnny's Selected Seeds*

Imperator types are long, slender, and tapered. They need loose, well-worked soil to grow straight and long. Try one of these varieties:

- **Purple Haze** has dark-purple skin with bright orange inside. It has great flavor raw or cooked and grows seven-to-eight-inch roots.
- **Sugarsnax** has dark-orange, slender, and tender roots that grow nine to ten inches long.

Danvers varieties are medium-long and have wider shoulders, like a classic carrot shape. The “shoulder” or crown is the round top where the stems meet the root. Chantenay types are short and rounder. Many kinds of carrots can grow well in Kentucky.

## How much to plant

You can harvest about one pound of carrots for every foot of row planted. Plant 5 to 10 feet for a single person, or 20 to 40 feet for a family of four.

## How and when to plant

Carrots most often are direct seeded from mid-March until early May. They grow better in spring but can also be planted in August and September for a fall crop.

Carrots form long roots in loose, well-draining soil. Mix in compost to clay soils to loosen and improve drainage.

Plant seed one-quarter inch deep in rows 18 inches or more apart. Carrot seed is slow to germinate, so be sure to keep the soil moist until the carrots start to grow. Thin carrots to two to three inches between plants once the seedlings are one to two inches tall. The “thinnings,” or baby carrots that you remove, can be added to soups or eaten raw.

Radish seed can be mixed with the carrot seed to improve germination. The radishes will break the soil and mark the row, making it easier for the carrots to grow. Harvest or remove the radishes before they compete with the carrots.

## Carrot Planting

**Rows** 18 inches apart  
**Seed Depth** 1/4 inch  
**Thin** 2–3 inches apart

### Safe Planting Dates

### Spring

### Fall

Eastern Kentucky	April 1 – May 1	Aug. 1 – 15
Central Kentucky	March 20 – April 20	Aug. 15 – Sept. 1
Western Kentucky	March 10 – April 10	Sept. 1 – 15



## Pests and diseases

Carrots only have a few pests. Carrot rust flies (or root maggots) are attracted to the smell of the leaves. They lay their eggs in the crown of the plant. When they hatch, the small white maggots will then eat holes in the carrot roots. The next season, plant a different vegetable in their space to reduce their numbers.

Aphids can also attack carrots in warmer weather. Knock off aphids with a hard spray of water or squish them by hand. Flea beetles, sowbugs, and cutworms can also be

an issue. Please see UK Cooperative Extension publication *Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky* (ID-128) at <https://publications.ca.uky.edu/id-128>, or contact your county Extension agent for help in dealing with pests.

The caterpillars of black swallowtail butterflies feed on carrot leaves. Children may enjoy their brightly striped bodies and watching them grow and produce a chrysalis. These caterpillars are often not harmful to the carrots unless there are a lot of them. If there seem to be too many, simply remove them.



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Carrot rust fly maggots in a carrot root

Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org, CC BY 3.0



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Swallowtail caterpillar

Ansel Oommen, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



## Harvesting

Carrots should be harvested when they reach the ideal size for the type grown. If left to grow larger, they get woody and tough. If needed, gently pull back the soil to look at the shoulders of the carrots. See how big they have grown. When they are wide enough (one-half inch to one inch, based on the type), they are ready to harvest. The shoulders may turn green if above the soil, but this is not harmful. The biggest roots can be pulled first and smaller roots can be left to grow larger. Harvest fall-planted carrots before freezing weather. Remove tops after harvest to keep roots crisp.

## Serving

Carrots are fat-free, cholesterol-free, low in sodium, and an excellent source of vitamin A, which is an important vitamin for eye health. Carrots can be eaten raw or cooked. Rinse and remove the ends, and peel if desired. Use them raw in salads, serve them with dips, or eat them plain as a snack. For cooking, whole or cut carrots can be steamed, boiled, microwaved, or roasted. They can also be added to stir-fries, soups, stews, and casseroles.

## Storing

Wash carrot roots and trim tops to one-half inch long. Store in a loose plastic bag in the refrigerator or a cool, moist cellar. Carrots will keep for two to four months. Do not store carrots in the same space as apples and other fruit. Fruits give off a gas that will make carrots bitter.

## Clean up

Harvest plants before the ground freezes. Compost healthy plant material. Throw away any diseased plants.



Carrot tops ready for harvest  
*University of Kentucky CSA*



Freshly harvested carrots  
*University of Kentucky CSA*



Remove tops to keep carrots crisp.  
*University of Kentucky CSA*

## Summary

### Varieties

Try carrot varieties such as Bolero, Little Finger, Mokum, Napoli, Yaya, Purple Haze, and Sugarsnax.

### How much to plant

Five to ten feet of row should be enough for one person. Or plant 20 to 40 feet of row for a family of four.

### How and when to plant

Plant according to dates on the Carrot Planting chart. For summer carrots, plant in March and April. For fall harvest, plant in August and September. Work some compost into clay soils to allow better roots to form. Plant seeds directly in the garden one-quarter inch deep. Carrot seed is slow to germinate, so keep the soil moist until the carrots start to grow. Thin carrots to every two to three inches. Mix in some radish seeds to help break up the soil and mark your row.

### Pests and diseases

If needed, knock off aphids with hard sprays of water. Swallowtail butterfly caterpillars may eat the leaves but can usually be left on the plant. They shouldn't harm the roots.

### Harvesting

Harvest carrots when they reach the right size for their type. Pick bigger carrots first. Remove tops after harvest to keep crisp.

### Serving

Eat carrots raw or cooked. Wash well. You can cut off the ends or peel them if desired.

### Storing

Wash and trim tops to one-quarter inch. Store loosely wrapped in a cool place. Carrots can keep for two to four months.

### Clean up

Harvest before ground freezes.

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