

CARROTS

dr compost



THE VEGE FILES

CARROTS

Carrots don't want to be grown in your richest, most composted garden bed. They will often do well following another crop without composting the bed again. At the same time, they won't grow well in hard packed dry soils lacking in organic matter. If you have some leaf mould, fork this in generously. Failing this a light sprinkle of compost on the bed will help keep this soil functioning.

Consider sowing a green manure like lupins at the same time. Sow in between the rows, and cut back the lupins back hard and drop the top on the soil. Keep doing all season long. You're fixing nitrogen for the next crop and encouraging biological activity, plus the mulch will slowdown water loss.

Soil temperature needs to be above 15 C for carrots. In early spring, raised beds will warm up earlier than traditional beds. Using a large cloche for a week prior to sowing will help warm the ground.

1. Fork the top 15-25 cm of soil to a fine tith, free of lumpy soil.

If your soil is hard pack, lightly mix in 2-3cm of compost. Leaf mould is good because it's rich in organic matter but not so rich in nitrogen which can cause forking and heavy top growth.

2. Create some drill lines (indentations in the soil) where you wish to sow your seed. You can use the end of a hoe, a stick or the side corner edge of a wooden plank.

3. Mix your carrot seed in an ice cream container with 3 cups of sand, 3 cups of fine compost or vermicast and 1 cup of vermiculite (optional). Mix it up well, really well.

4. Sow the carrot seed mix into your drill lines using a trowel, the ice cream container or your hands. Rows should be 15cm apart min (depending on how big your hoe is). A bigger spacing allows for other crops to go in between, classically onions and carrots are good companion plants.

5. You don't need to cover the seeds with soil, just pat down lightly and water. Cover loosely with frost cloth

or wind break, with stones in the corners to stop it blowing away. Or place a plank of untreated wood directly on top of the seeds. This keeps the soil moisture levels on an even keel.

6. Water and check every day until seeds germinate. Once they germinate, take the cover off and reduce your watering. It's better to water deeply and less often, we want those roots to head down to give you long, strong carrots.

7. When the leaves get up to 3- 4 cm, thin the seedlings to leave enough room for your carrots to get big. You can leave it longer and pull them as very young carrots for your salad. Keep thinning as needed.

8. Pick your carrots as you desire, they can be eaten young, mature or over winter. Sow carrots in Jan/Feb for a winter crop. During winter, cover them with a deep mulch of straw and dig as needed. This may not work if you suffer from permafrost.

Recommended varieties to try: Nantes, Berlicum, Touchon, Carrot Purple Dragon

