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# Growing Root Crops

The root crops covered in this fact sheet are *beets*, *carrots*, *radish*, *rutabagas* and *turnips*. All have similar cultural requirements. Although *kohlrabi* is a swollen stem crop, not a root crop, it is also included since this vegetable is grown in much the same way as are root crops. All of these crops can be planted in early spring and will continue to produce into late fall if successive plantings are made.

## Growing Conditions

**Site** Full sun is preferable for all vegetable crops. However, root crops will tolerate some shade while producing a good crop.

**Soil** A sandy loam soil is best suited for uniform root development of root crops. While radish and beets will grow in relatively shallow soil, carrots and parsnips require a deep, loose soil for optimum root development. Rocky or clay soils can be amended with heavy applications of compost or other matter but such soils should be planted to root crops only as a last resort.

**Fertilizer** Have soil tested to determine actual lime and fertilizer needs. Add limestone or wood ashes to maintain the pH in the range of 6.0 to 6.8. Fertilizer equivalent to 2.5 pounds per 100 square feet of 10-10-10 should be incorporated into the soil before planting. Organic growers can use composted manures, kitchen-scrap compost and mineral fertilizers.

## Planting

Root crops are seeded in early spring (mid-April to mid-May) for early crops and in successive plantings for season-long production. Rutabagas yield best when seeded about mid-July so that final root development occurs during cooler weather.

**Row Spacing** – 12 to 24 inches (6 to 12 inches for radish)

**Seeding Depth** – Seed 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep in furrows in moist soil. If soil should be heavy, cover with a lighter material – sand, vermiculite or amended soil. A heavy crust over beets, carrots and parsnips will inhibit or delay germination.

**Plant Spacing** – Be rigorous in thinning. *Do not neglect to thin* when plants are 2 to 3 inches high.

1 to 2 inches – carrots and radish

1 to 3 inches – beets (late thinnings can be used for greens)

3 to 4 inches – parsnips

4 to 6 inches – kohlrabi, rutabagas and turnips

## Weed Control

Do not seed into quackgrass-infested areas. Clean out the grass one year in advance of seeding. Control annual with organic mulches, hand-weeding, hoeing or cultivating. Apply mulches 2 to 3 inches thick after the crops have been thinned.

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