

Starting plants from seed and watching them grow and develop into food is exceptionally satisfying. Now that early spring is upon us, why not consider

growing root crops. The time to begin is fast approaching. Consider the following root crops: radishes, beets and carrots. All three are cool weather crops and considered relatively easy to grow. Each is best grown if the seed is directly sown into the garden. One can begin planting seeds about



four weeks before the last expected frost date. Since our last expected frost date is May 15, I encourage planting from mid-to-late April.

All three of these root crops are delicious to eat and each offers assorted vitamins and nutrients. They each provide a wide range of qualities, including flavor, texture, color and unusual shape. Each can be eaten and enjoyed raw or cooked. Before planting, all one needs to know is how to grow.

The first step in growing these root crops is selecting a variety. Radishes and beets both come in many interesting shapes and beautiful colors. Beets have flavors that range from earthy to sweet, and radishes offer varying degrees of heat. Most individuals select the variety of carrot based on its color and shape. While time is available, I suggest one start investigating the many available varieties and select the one most liked. Pay close attention to the back of the seed packet you buy for growing instructions.

Radishes are one of the easiest to grow. The seeds germinate in about 10 days and mature quickly in about 22 days from start to finish. Radishes take up little space, and other veggies can later be planted in their place. Sow seeds at a depth of 4 times the size of the seeds, planting successively at two-week intervals until

mid-spring and then again in late summer. Choose a site in full sun with loose, rich, moist, well-drained soil.

Beets take about ten days to germinate and generally mature in fifty to sixty days. Soak beet seeds in warm water for 24 hours before sowing -- this will aid in germination. Sow beet seeds also at a depth of 4 times the size of the seeds, planting successively at three-week intervals for crops throughout the season. Plant in full sun in loose, rich, well-drained soil.

Carrots can take up to three weeks to germinate. Sow carrot seeds at a ¼-inch depth, planting successively at three-week intervals until early summer. Grow in full sun in rich, loose, deeply worked and well-drained soil.

After sowing, consider these special treatments:

- All three root crops prefer loose soil and cool temperatures.
- Thin out seedlings to allow adequate room for roots to develop.
- The most common problem when growing root crops is failing to thin the plants properly.
- Fertilize soil prior to planting.
- Young carrot seedlings are weak and slow growing so keep the surface of soil loose by gentle watering.
- Keep weeds under control, but be careful only to do shallow cultivation.
- Apply mulch or soil around the base of the plants.
- Keep plants well-watered and with carrots, keep soil moist throughout germination.
- Consider mixing radish seeds with carrot seeds to help break any crusting soil surface.

It is time to begin purchasing and planting root crop seeds. Remember, starting plants from seed and watching them grow and develop into food is exceptionally satisfying and enjoyable!