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How to Grow Carrots in Colors of the Rainbow

By Dr. Mercola | July 21st, 2017

Carrots, while higher in sugar than many other vegetables and therefore best eaten in moderation, have a number of excellent health benefits, including:

- Healthy vision
- Brain and nervous system health
- Liver protection
- Protection against heart disease and stroke
- Promotion of healthy bones

One serving of orange carrots (one medium carrot or one-half cup chopped) will provide about 210 percent of the average daily recommended allowance (RDA) of vitamin A. The high vitamin A content, for which carrots are best known, comes from beta-carotene, which is converted into vitamin A in your liver.

Your body cannot manufacture beta-carotene, so you have to get it from your diet, and carrots contain some of the highest levels of beta-carotene of any vegetable. A single serving will also give you 10 percent of the RDA of vitamin K, 6 percent of vitamin C and 2 percent of calcium. That said, different colored carrots will provide you with different sets of nutrients.

- Red carrots will be higher in lycopene and beta-carotene pigment, linked to a lower risk of certain cancers, including prostate cancer
- Yellow contain high amounts of xanthophyll and lutein, associated with cancer prevention and eye health
- White or pale-yellow carrots tend to be milder, with high fiber content
- Purple carrots contain higher amounts of anthocyanin, beta- and alpha-carotenes, and have a sweeter and sometimes peppery flavor

Carrots Come in Many Colors

One benefit of growing your own carrots is that you can grow varieties you'll typically never see in a grocery store. Carrots actually come in a number of different colors and shapes, from light yellow to deep purple. As noted by GrowVeg.com:

"Different colors of carrot originate from different parts of the world. Each color has its own history and particular health benefits ... Purple carrots, for example, hail from the Middle East and Turkey and are rich in anthocyanins which are known to

guard against heart disease.

Red carrots originate from China and India. Chock full of lycopene, these roots can reduce the risk of macular degeneration, so while they may not help you see in the dark they're certainly good news for eye health.

Carrots that are yellow originate from the Middle East and are just as good for the eyes. They contain [lutein] and xanthophyll that minimize the risk of hardening of the arteries while potentially preventing lung and other cancers ... [B]y growing a mixture of varieties you'll be increasing the odds of keeping yourself in exceptionally fine fettle."

Popular Carrot Varieties

Carrots are a joy to grow in your garden, as they're delicious right out of the ground. If vegetables are unpopular with your kids, grow some carrots and watch them change their mind once they start pulling these sweet snacks out of the dirt.

Depending on the variety you sow, you can grow them in spring and fall, into early winter. The following carrot varieties tend to be popular among gardeners. You can also buy premixed blends that will give you a mixture of different colors. Examples include Rainbow, Cosmic Color and Harlequin blends, which will give you a mix of pale yellow to red carrots. For even more suggestions, see RareSeeds.com.

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| ✓ Nantes: A fast grower that adapts well to a range of soils and climates | ✓ Cosmic Purple: A dark reddish purple variety with solid orange center |
| ✓ Chantenay: A shorter, stockier root that gets sweeter toward the fall as the temperatures drop | ✓ Purple Haze: A deep purple carrot with an orange core, Purple Haze adds gorgeous color to any dish |
| ✓ Miniature: Much smaller than the average carrot, miniature carrots are particularly good if you have a lot of clay in your soil | ✓ Yellowstone: Smooth-skinned and extra sweet |
| ✓ Emperor: A longer variety, the Emperor needs deep, sandy soil to grow well | ✓ Red Samurai: Scarlet-colored on the outside and pink inside, Red Samurai is another eye-catching addition to any dish |
| ✓ Danvers: Particularly popular for juicing and tends to store well long-term | ✓ Atomic Red: A very bright orange-red variety |

Planting Guidelines

For a spring/summer crop, sow your seeds directly in your plant bed in a sunny area, about two weeks before the last frost date. For best germination, your soil should be between 60 and 70 degrees F. For a continuous crop, continue planting every two to three weeks until midsummer. If you live in hotter climates, your planting season will be shorter than if you live in a cooler climate.

For a fall/winter crop, sow your seeds about 12 weeks before your first frost date. Mother Earth News' vegetable planner⁵ can help you find your average first and last frost dates.

For well-shaped carrots, you'll want to make sure your soil is nice and loose to a depth of at least 12 inches. Hard or stony soils will result in misshapen roots. Mix in a 1-inch layer of compost, or

a half-inch layer of vermicompost, and plant your seeds a quarter-inch deep, 2 inches apart. If you're doing rows, space them about 10 inches apart.

Once the seedlings start to sprout, thin them so they're 2 to 6 inches apart, depending on the variety, to avoid crowding the roots. Avoid fertilizers high in nitrogen, as carrots need more phosphorous and potassium than nitrogen, and aim for a soil pH between 5.8 and 7.0 to optimize nutrient uptake. If your soil is too acidic, you can raise the pH by adding a bit of lime.

Once the seeds are planted, be sure to water consistently for the first 10 days. A soaker hose can be helpful for this. The soil should be kept moist but not soggy. Carrot seeds typically germinate slower than other veggies, so be patient. You can retain moisture by covering the soil with wood planks or a blanket for the first five or six days. As soon as the seeds show signs of life, remove the cover.

Weeds can be kept at a minimum and moisture can be retained with a layer of mulch once the seedlings have sprouted. Another way to reduce weeds is to grow radishes in with your carrots.

Pest and Disease Prevention

A number of wild critters will enjoy munching on carrots, so depending on where you live, you may have to contend with wild animals entering your garden, ripping up your beds. Fences and other physical barriers may need to be installed to keep them out.

In terms of insects, the most common carrot pest is the aster leafhopper, which can spread aster yellow, a bacterial disease that causes hairy and misshapen roots. Using row covers will help prevent leafhoppers. Growing your carrots in compost-enriched soil, and far away from nut trees, fruit trees and grapes will also help, as these plants serve as hosts to the bacteria.

Harvesting and Storage

Carrots are easily harvested simply by loosening the soil around the roots with a digging fork and then gently pulling them out by their tops. Fully matured carrots will have the best flavor. Once harvested, cut off the top to maintain moisture in the carrot, rinse off the dirt and store in a cool dry place.

A root cellar is ideal, but you may also store them in your refrigerator, where they will keep for a few months. Pickling or fermenting them will allow them to be stored even longer. For a demonstration, see the video below.

Boil Unpeeled Carrots for Maximum Nutrition

Most people assume eating carrots raw is the way to get the most nutrition, but science reveals that's not always the case. It turns out that cooking carrots whole, skin intact, without chopping, slicing, grating, shredding or peeling them, is the best way to obtain the most nutrients from them. Just lightly scrub them first to remove surface dirt, and make sure you have an extra-large pot that will fit them.

Once the carrots are cooked, they can then be chopped in the manner you desire. Just before serving, add a little olive or coconut oil and butter to further maximize nutrient absorption. One of the nutrients maximized by cooking your carrots whole and unpeeled is falcarinol, a potent

anticancer compound.

Researchers have found that carrots boiled before being cut contained 25 percent more falcarinol, and as a result, 25 percent more cancer-fighting capabilities, than those chopped beforehand. Researchers also maintain that boiling carrots whole and unpeeled makes them taste better. Nearly 100 volunteers took the taste test, and 80 percent of them came to that conclusion.