



# Harvest of the Month

# CARROTS



## All About Carrots— Crunch into the Carrot Craze!

From their sweet taste to their leafy greens, there's so much to celebrate about this awesome root vegetable.



## Social Science

The ancestors of the carrots we know today still grow wild in their native habitats of Central Asia. Carrots were first domesticated in the region that today includes Iran and Afghanistan. The first written mention of edible carrot roots come from the writings of 1st century Romans. By the 8th century carrots had made their way to Spain. People carried them north from there and by the 12th century they had become a staple food on the European continent. The Dutch developed orange carrots in the 16th century, and carrots were brought to North America by early English colonists in the 17th century.

China is the top carrot producing country in the world. California is the top carrot producing state in the U.S.

## Botany

Carrots are known scientifically as *Daucus carota* ssp. *sativus*. They are members of the Apiaceae family along with many important culinary and medicinal crops such as parsley, celery, coriander (cilantro), fennel, dill and cumin. Similar to other members of the family, carrot plants are quite fragrant and their seeds are edible. In fact, carrots were first cultivated for their leaves and seeds. Early carrot roots were quite woody and bitter and most of the selective breeding done over the centuries has been to replace that bitterness with sweetness and reduce the woody core. Originally, carrots were a reddish purple color or yellow. Orange carrots were not bred and did not become popular until much later in their history.

Zanahoria means carrot  
in Spanish.





## Nutrition

Carrots are a rich source of beta carotene, the high antioxidant red/orange pigment that the body converts into vitamin A. Vitamin A supports the skin, lungs, brain, immune system and eye health- hence the vegetable's claim to fame for being good for vision. The richer the orange color, the higher the vitamin content!

## Growing Tips



### Planting Preparation:

Carrots are historically a cool weather crop but modern varieties can be more heat tolerant and it is possible to plant carrots year round. Carrots grow best in loose sandy loam soil. Carrots are notoriously slow to germinate, so don't forget where you planted them and make sure to keep their seedbed moist until they start to emerge in 1-3 weeks.

### Proper Spacing and Care:

To have carrots to harvest year round, pick varieties that will work in each season and make successive sowings every 4 to 6 weeks. Sprinkle in rows or broadcast seed over the prepared bed space. Be sure not to sow too thickly or you will waste a lot of seed and time thinning out carrots later. Carrot seed is small so only cover with no more than ¼" of soil.



### Harvesting Tips:

Begin pulling carrots at the size that is right for you, remembering that mature carrots will be sweeter as they've stored more sugars in their roots. Carrots, especially during the cooler months of the year, can be left in the ground and harvested as needed even after they're sized up.



## Pro Carrot Tip!

Don't toss your carrot tops! The herby, leafy green stems that grow above ground and eventually bear the seeds of this root crop are delicious and nutritious as well! Use them as a garnish, like you would with parsley or cilantro, or blend them into an herby pesto with nuts, sunflower seeds or pepitas. Just be sure to give them a nice soak in ice cold water beforehand, and rinse until the water runs clear.



## Cooking with Carrots

There are no limits to how you can use carrots in the kitchen. Enjoy them raw in fresh, zingy salads and juices, or as a dipping vehicle at snack time. Roast them in the oven at around 400 degrees F for some caramelized goodness, add them into stir fry's, slowly simmer them with potatoes in stews, or blend them into creamy, nourishing soups with warming spices like ginger and curry. You can even grate and bake them into delicious cakes, muffins and loaves for some added nutrition in your sweet treats.

For carrot recipes visit [SGN's Cooking From The Garden page](#)