

Carrots

Growing carrots in the polytunnel is a year-round affair. Unless you miss a sowing, it's so easy to produce baby carrots all year round that you quickly come to view them as a completely different vegetable to the big maincrop carrots you grow outside – indeed some people stop growing outdoor carrots altogether. You don't need much space for carrots either: a 30cm row per adult each time you sow is plenty.

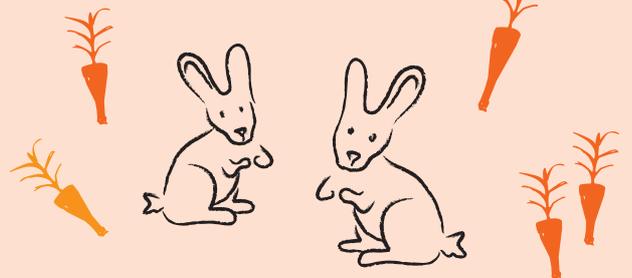
Varieties: Nantes 2 is a sweet 'second early' variety that gives baby carrots quickly, but won't become woody if you accidentally leave some to mature (and you will).

Sowing: No feeding of the soil is necessary, but it's a good idea to dig the soil to a depth of 15cm to break up any lumps or compaction, then water it down well. Very heavy soils may need some leafmould or sand to break them up. Sow the carrot seeds very thinly in drills 1.5-2cm deep and 20cm apart, and water them. Use a watering can with a fine rose to avoid washing the tiny seeds away.

Unless the weather is cool, then I like to cover the bed with a sack or double thickness of fleece; this improves germination by helping to keep the soil moist until the first seedlings appear (which may take up to three weeks). As soon as the seedlings have their first true leaves, thin them to 5cm and make your next sowing. Keep this routine going from February to the end of August, when you should make one last larger sowing to see you through the winter. I don't usually thin this last sowing, but carefully pull the larger roots first, leaving the others to stand a little longer.



all lined up,
ready to grow



the rabbits will have to get their fix elsewhere, your polytunnel should prevent them having their midnight feasts...



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carrots

harvest

growing

Carrots do not need feeding provided you don't plant them in the same spot year after year: the only attention they need is regular watering, and perhaps a light dressing of compost if the tops of the roots begin to turn green.

Diseases and pests: The biggest scourge of carrots is carrot root fly, which is hardly ever a problem in polytunnels. Slugs will attack the seedlings if other food is scarce, but once the plants are growing strongly they are rarely a problem.

Carrots are
a real low
maintenance
crop...



...you can even get
away with NOT
rotating the crop



carrots

growing

harvest

Gently remove the soil around the top of one or two roots with your fingers to see if the roots are big enough to begin harvesting. When they are, water the bed to make the roots easy to remove and pop out as many of the larger ones as you need, leaving the smaller ones to grow for a little longer. Twist the leaves off the carrots as soon as they are out of the ground so that they don't lose moisture through the foliage. Baby carrots don't usually need to be peeled – just wash them well and you're ready to go.

Recipe: Carrots are so versatile, depending whether you want a savoury or sweet dish, here are some ideas...

Savoury

soup, salad, coleslaw, bread, gratin, burgers, puree, pickled, roast

Sweet

carrot cake/muffins



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Don't forget to check out the growing guide too

