Carrots are very nutritious as they are rich in vitamin C, B1 and B2. They can be used in many ways—raw in salads, cooked and eaten on their own or added to soups, stews and other dishes.

When to grow

- Carrots are not particularly sensitive to damage by winter cold and frost.
- Heavy frost just before harvesting may, however, scorch the leaves.
- Carrots do best under cool conditions, but they can also withstand heat.
- In hot, frost-free areas avoid the very hot months (October to January).
- In cooler areas the best time to plant carrots is from February to April and from August to October.
- In mild areas they can be planted throughout the year.

Where to grow

- The gardener wants to grow numerous straight, smooth roots. The best soil for carrots is therefore sandy loamy or loamy soils which are deep, well worked and fairly loose.
- Heavy, stony, compacted or poorly-drained soils cause deformed roots.
• Do not work in compost or manure just before you plant the carrots. If the soil is too rich, it will result in excessive leaf growth and the roots may be forked and hairy as well as rougher on the outside. Instead, use compost or manure from a previous crop such as cabbage.
• Avoid very light soils which can be blown away by the wind because the young plants are easily damaged by wind-blown sand.
• Exposed shoulders of roots tend to turn green.
• Do not plant carrots in very acid or brackish soils.

Preparing the soil
• Beds should be 1 m wide, any convenient length and separated by paths 40 to 50 cm wide.
• Prepare the soil in the beds thoroughly to a depth of 30 cm.
• Remove all clods and stones.
• The surface should be level and fine.
• It is important that the soil should drain well. The beds must therefore be raised, except where the soil is sandy.

Sowing
• Sow the seeds directly in the beds.
• Make small furrows one fingernail (1 cm) deep. They must be about two or three handwidths (20 to 30 cm) apart.
• Sow the seeds about 1 to 2 cm apart in the furrows.
• Water the beds well after sowing.
• In hot, dry weather, cover the rows with a thin layer of grass until the seeds emerge after 7 to 14 days.
• Remove the grass as soon as the plants emerge to prevent leggy plants and spread thinly between the rows.

Caring for the plants
• Water the seedlings regularly:
  – In the first week twice a day
  – In the second week once a day
  – In the third week three times a week.
• Thinning out is necessary to ensure a good crop.
• When two to three leaves have appeared, thin out the seedlings to about 2 to 3 cm apart.
• When the seedlings are about 15 cm tall, thin them out once again to about 5 to 7 cm apart.
• The roots from the second thinning may be big enough to eat.
• Thin out the plants when the soil is moist, preferably in the late afternoon when it is cooler.
• Earth up the remaining plants and water lightly.
• Always make sure that the shoulders of the carrots are lightly covered with soil to prevent greening.
• Remove weeds regularly, those close to the carrots by hand and the rest with a hoe.
• Keep the soil between the rows covered with a grass mulch.
Harvesting

- Carrots can be harvested after 12 to 16 weeks.
- Harvest them as soon as they are the size you want.
- When you remove the bigger carrots the others will have more space to develop.
- Do not leave carrots in the soil too long—younger carrots taste much better than the older ones.
- On sandy soils you can pull up the carrots by hand.
- Preferably pull up the roots by hand or use a fork.

For further information contact your nearest provincial department of agriculture.

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