



# LET CARROTS

make a crunch in your garden this summer

*Julie Balzan  
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Carrots are more than just rabbit food.

The iconic orange vegetable that makes its way into many dinner salads and onto plates is delicious, nutritious, and well-suited for Wyoming.

This hardy vegetable can be grown in a wide variety of soils, resist periods of light frost, and has low nutrient requirements compared to other vegetables.

Carrots are biennial plants, meaning they complete their life cycle in two years. They produce leaves and roots the first year then are usually harvested for eating. They will send up a flower stalk and produce seed if they survive until their second year. Red, white, yellow, purple, and orange are root color variations. The shape of carrots varies from long and slender to short and

stubby. The taste also varies between varieties.

## **Planting and Care**

Transplanting carrots from seeds started inside can be difficult. Direct seeding is the most common practice, yet planting carrots too densely is very easy. Seeds should be scattered lightly and not planted too deeply in the soil. A general rule of thumb is to not plant seeds any deeper in the soil than one and half times the length of the seed. Carrot seeds are very small, and seeds planted deeper in the soil (such as at depths one would plant bean, pea, or corn seeds) will likely never germinate. Soils should be kept moist during germination and early growing stages to avoid poor production and decreased germination.

When planting, seeds can be mixed with other seeds such as radish to avoid

planting too densely. The radish seeds decrease the seeding rate and provide a crop that matures quickly, usually around 20-25 days. When the radish plants are ready for harvest, they can be pulled, leaving available space for carrot plants to fully mature.

Carrots can also be thinned by hand once seeds have germinated. If carrots are planted too close together and not thinned, expect to get a lot of carrots, but they will be too small and spindly for eating. You can also expect with a high density planting for individual carrots to “twist” or several different carrots to grow together and form what appear to be odd mutations.

As with other vegetable crops, rotating where you plant them in the garden each year is important to avoid disease and nutrition issues.

Carrots planted into heavy clay soils are often less



*Carrots grow in all shapes and sizes.*



*Colorful – and large – carrots are now available.*

productive. Planting carrots in gardens that receive full sun, soils with adequate moisture and nutrients, and not planted too densely, will produce high yields. Carrots may become twisted, forked, or otherwise misshapen due to rock, stones, or nematodes in the soils.

With relatively few insect and disease issues, carrots are low maintenance and require few inputs. Slugs occasionally enjoy chewing on the tops of carrot roots once exposed.

A great control method is an open, short can full of beer, which attracts the slugs, and they fall into the can.

Carrot varieties range from 55 to 90 days to maturity. Shorter days to maturity varieties are ideal for Wyoming's short growing season.

Some of our favorite varieties (days to maturity):

- Purple: Dragon (75), Purple haze (70),

- Orange: Nantes varieties (70), Danvers varieties (70), Chantenay red core (75), Oxheart (80-90), Mokum (54). Mokum is extremely sweet and crunchy, which also makes it brittle, dig carefully to harvest.
- White: Lunar white (75),
- Yellow: Amarillo (75), Yellowstone (70)
- Red: Atomic Red (75), red samurai (75)

### **Eat'em Up**

Carrots are an inexpensive, nutritious, colorful, and versatile addition to the rainbow of vegetables we eat daily.

A 7-inch long carrot has 30 calories, 2 grams of fiber and sugar, beta carotene, 110 percent of the RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) for vitamin A, 10 percent of the RDA for vitamin C, and 2 percent of the RDA for calcium and iron.

A range of colorful carrots are becoming available to consumers. Depending upon color, carrots contain a wide array of phytonutrients: xanthophylls and lutein are linked to good eye health and are found in yellow carrots.

Lycopene is found in red carrots and has been found to guard against heart disease and some types of cancers.

Purple carrots contain anthocyanins, a type of antioxidant.

Some dark-orange carrots have even been bred for higher levels of beta-carotene (to help combat vitamin A deficiency across the globe). Variety 'A Plus' is one of these.

Choose firm, smooth carrots when buying. Carrots are sold with or without the green tops attached. Carrot tops should be vibrant green and not wilted. If purchasing carrots with tops attached, remove them by



*Preparing for a vegetable treat.*

cutting or twisting off above the top of the carrot prior to storage.

Most carrot varieties will store well in the refrigerator for two months in an airtight container without loss of nutrients. Carrots stored at warmer temperatures will lose nutrients more quickly.

Before eating, whole carrots require a thorough rinse in cool running water and a rub with a vegetable brush or your hand to remove all dirt. Carrots can be eaten peeled or unpeeled. Baby style carrots are washed, peeled, and ready to eat upon purchase.

Add grated carrots to soups or salads. Practice knife skills and add

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carrots to a stir-fry. Julienne sticks are a nutritious addition to a relish tray and make a portable snack. The rainbow of colors available make beautiful salads and garnishes.

Carrots can be steamed, roasted, microwaved, and boiled. Try cooking to varying degrees of doneness. Tender crisp is one favorite way to eat cooked carrots. Puree (well done) cooked carrots to add to soups, pasta sauces, and baked goods to increase the vitamin A content. Shredded carrots added to muffins increase fiber and vitamin content. The addition of shredded or pureed vegetables to quick breads allows for a reduction in the amount of fat in the recipe.

Please see the garden section on the Barnyards and Backyards website for more information on vegetable gardening in Wyoming.

*We wonder if carrot enthusiasts **Julie Balzan** and **Brian Sebade** ever have to visit optometrists. Balzan is the University of Wyoming Extension nutrition and food safety educator in Platte County, and Sebade is the extension educator based in Albany County and serving southeast Wyoming. Balzan can be reached at (307) 322-3667 or [jbalkan@uwyo.edu](mailto:jbalkan@uwyo.edu). Sebade can be contacted at (307) 721-2571 or [bsebade@uwyo.edu](mailto:bsebade@uwyo.edu).*