

# *Crisp, Crunchy Radishes & Carrots*

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by Annie Plowman

Crisp, crunchy, bright and easy! What better way to start your winter vegetable garden! We are starting with some of the easiest winter vegetables; radishes and carrots. When I told my daughter of the first project for our winter garden, she recounted fond memories of picking carrots that were grown in the vegetable garden at her elementary school. Even high-school age kids can get excited about a garden!

You may be planting in traditional rows but, due to my limited space, I am going to be doing all or most of my winter crops in containers. I'd avoid planting carrots in your flower beds because you may have trouble getting rid of them later. The choice is yours. Before you start, there are a few important considerations.

What are your plans for snails? Did you know there are people-and-pet-safe products for snails? Having an organic garden does not mean you need to let the critters have their way with your vegetables. Become a label reader! There are products out there that are safe to use in your vegetable garden. A reputable garden center will have knowledgeable salespeople who can help you find the right products.

Radishes are going to mature in about 25 days. Carrots will be ready in about 65 days. For that reason, many home gardeners will plant the radishes in the same row to mark where the carrots were planted. This is also a space saving technique. The radishes will be harvested when the carrot seedlings are tiny. If the carrots haven't sprouted, the radishes may not be ready yet but, you can pop one up and check.

I am going to use recycled containers. It is about 24" in diameter and 15" deep. I have chosen the smallest (narrow) variety of carrot seed I was able to find on the shelf. In my case, The "Scarlet Nantes". I grabbed up seeds for a few different varieties of radishes because I will likely replant several times and well, I just like them! They are going in the same container. I will have extra seeds that I will pass along to a friend! Note: If you are going out to buy seeds, you'll probably want to pick up some seeds for loose leaf lettuces, turnips and peas. Those are some upcoming topics.

My container has a few holes for drainage (very important) and good quality "potting" soil (super duper important). I am using an organic vegetable fertilizer that is easy to find at your local nursery. These organic fertilizers offer so much to give you a good crop, that I highly recommend the organic vegetable or starter fertilizer. I suppose I could write an entire blog on that topic alone but, we need to get our vegetables planted so, I'll save that for another time. A good organic fertilizer with beneficial microbes and mycorrhizae (fungi that works with the roots) does make a difference. A fertilizer that includes Alfalfa meal will be even better.

Don't forget to keep a good watch on the water over the next few weeks especially. As you know, our temperature can fluctuate greatly at the change of seasons. If you let your seeds and starts dry out, you could very well lose your crop. If you've got your garden growing in containers, you can even slide them into a shady spot temporarily if we get a really hot day. Don't drown your vegetables but, don't let them dry out. Nice evenly moist soil is best.

This paragraph is for you lucky ones with a large enough area for a garden patch. The area where you are going to plant must be weed free. If you are doing rows and have weeds then; kill it, till it and add compost. You must have healthy soil that drains well. For the purposes of carrots and radishes you will likely plant a slightly mounded 20' row if you use one pkg. of carrot seed and 2 pkg's of radish seeds. The seed packages should have very good directions. If they don't, don't buy them. Spacing on carrots will be about 1/2" and 1" on radishes. We'll be doing more vegetables so, feel free to prepare more rows now depending on how many vegetables you plan to plant.

So... Back to critters. The snails are watching you. You think you don't have them but, oh you will! Put that snail bait (people-and-pet-safe snail bait) down on the day you plant! The snails are often responsible for getting to your newly germinated seeds before you even have a chance to see green.

Lastly, my memory can be like a sieve. As such, I have a handful of popsicle (craft) sticks and a sharpie. I will be labeling all my crops with the variety, the date planted and the maturity date. The maturity date is important for root veggies because they need to be picked as soon as they are mature and the evidence is below ground. Mark your calendar too and keep (or photocopy) that seed pouch for future reference.

Are you having fun yet! More is on the way. I will post some links on my profile where you can find more detailed gardening instructions on the topics discussed but don't be intimidated. Here's a good link to the UC Davis Gardening website <http://cagardenweb.ucdavis.edu/> You can do this!



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