How to grow parsnips

**Parsnips (Pastinaca sativa)**
Family: Apiaceae (Carrot)
Season: Cool
Ease of growing: Moderate
Fertility needs: Medium
Water needs: High
Common propagation: Seed

**Seed facts**
Germination temperatures: 35°F to 85°F
Germination time: 10 to 21 days
Viability: 1 year
Direct sow: April

**Planning facts**
Spacing: 2” to 3”
Plants per square foot: 9
Time to harvest: 100 to 120 days

**General**

Parsnips are an under-appreciated vegetable, but devotees insist that few dishes are better than parsnips steamed, sliced and served with butter. It has a sweet, nutty flavor that enhances soups and stews. Parsnips are a nutritious member of the carrot family, a source of vitamins B6 and C and potassium. Though a biennial, it is grown as an annual. Parsnips are one of the hardiest vegetables. In fact, flavor is enhanced by frost.

**Preparation and planting**

Like carrots, parsnips like a deep, well-drained soil. Seeds germinate best when soil temperatures are 50°F to 70°F. Even at these temperatures, seeds may take three weeks or more to germinate. Be careful not to let the soil dry out and crust during this period or the small seeds may have difficulty breaking through. Some gardeners sow radishes in the row as a marker crop and to help break soil crusting.

**Care**

Cultural requirements for parsnips are very similar to those of carrots. They require consistent moisture, but are relatively untroubled by insect and disease pests. Their longer growing period requires vigilance for weed management.

**Major pests**

**Insects:** Aster leafhoppers.
**Diseases:** Alternaria and Cercospera.

**Harvesting and storage**

Harvest roots when they reach 1 inch in diameter. Expect about 70 roots per 25-foot row. Any that aren’t harvested in the fall can be mulched and overwintered for spring harvest. In the spring, harvest before tops begin sprouting.

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