

Home Gardening Series

Turnips-Rutabagas

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Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained, deep
Fertility – medium-rich
pH – 6.0 to 7.0
Temperature – cool
Moisture – average

Culture

Planting – direct seed, spring or fall
Spacing – 2-6 feet x 24 inches, thin
Hardiness – cool-season, biennial
Fertilizer – medium

Turnips-Rutabagas – *Brassica rapa* *Brassica napobrassica*

Turnips have been grown for nearly 3,000 years and have spread all over the world from their original home in temperate Europe. They reached Mexico in 1586, Virginia in 1610 and New England in 1628. Many types are grown, differing chiefly in the shape and color of the root. Rutabagas were found growing wild in 17th century Sweden and were thought to have come from Russia, a cross between turnips and cabbage.

Turnips and rutabagas (also known as Swedes or Swede turnips) are frost-hardy, cool-season vegetables often used as substitutes for potatoes.

Turnips are easy to grow. They mature in two months and may be planted early in the spring or fall for roots and greens. The spring crop is planted for summer use. The fall crop,



which is usually larger and of higher quality than the spring crop, may be used from the field all winter or may be stored for winter use. Turnips are a good winter cover crop for the garden. Purple Top White Globe is a general purpose turnip (used for greens and roots). A severe winter may kill off the greens, but the roots will still be of good quality. Seven Top is a hardy winter green that will not be killed off by frost and will make a good fall planting combination with Purple Top.

Rutabagas require four weeks longer to mature than turnips and are best grown as a fall crop. The foliage has smoother leaves, and the round roots are larger and firmer than those of turnips.

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Cultivars

Crop	Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Seed Per 100 Feet of Row	Remarks
Turnips	Purple Top White Globe	55	1/2 ounce	Attractive purple and white roots, good yield of roots. Can be used for both greens and roots.
	Seven Top	40	1/2 ounce	A very hardy winter green used mostly for greens. Dark green foliage, for fall planting only.
	White Lady Hybrid	50	1/2 ounce	White, semi-round root of mild, sweet flavor. Dark green tops.
	Alamo	48	1/2 ounce	Seven Top hybrid. Great flavor.
	Just Right	50	1/2 ounce	Smooth, pure white roots for fall and winter only.
	Tokyo Cross	35	1/2 ounce	AAS selection, uniform bright white roots for spring and fall.
Rutabagas	American Purple Top	90	1/2 ounce	Purplish color root above ground, light yellow below, with yellowish flesh of good texture and flavor.
	Laurentian	90	1/2 ounce	Deep purplish top, pale, smooth root and yellow flesh.

Abbreviation: **AAS**: All-America Selections®

Cultural Practices

Planting Time

For summer use, plant turnips as early in the spring as possible. For fall harvest, plant rutabagas in July; plant turnips during mid-August and early September.

Fall turnips may also be broadcast after early potatoes, cabbage, beets and peas or between rows of sweet corn. Prepare a good seedbed and rake the seed in lightly. No cultivation is necessary. Provide ample water for seed germination and for vigorous plant growth.

Spacing and Depth of Planting

Plant the seed 1/2 inch deep (3 to 20 seeds per foot of row). Allow 12 to 24 inches between rows. Water, if necessary, to germinate the seed and establish the seedlings. Thin rutabaga seedlings to 6 inches apart when they are 2 inches high. Thin turnip seedlings to 2 to 4 inches apart when they are 4 inches high. The removed plants will be large enough to use as greens. If you have planted turnips for greens, start to harvest the tops as needed when they are 4 to 6 inches high. Successive plantings at 10-day intervals will provide later harvests of quality roots or greens. Old turnips tend to be tough and woody.

Care

When the plants are small, cultivate 2 to 3 inches deep between rows. As the plants become larger, cultivate shallowly to prevent injury to the tender roots. Pull weeds that appear in the row.

Harvesting

Harvest throughout the winter as needed. Turnips and rutabagas are of best quality (mild and tender) when medium-sized (turnips should be 2 to 3 inches in diameter and rutabagas 3 to 5 inches in diameter). Both are hardy to fall frosts and light winter freezes. A heavy straw mulch will aid in extending harvest throughout the winter. Turnips and rutabagas keep well in refrigeration or in an underground root cellar. They may be dipped in warm wax to prevent loss of moisture.

Common Problems

Root maggots can be a problem in areas where radishes, turnips or rutabagas were grown the previous year. The soil should be treated with a suggested insecticide before the next planting.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why are my rutabagas small, tough and bitter tasting?

A. Rutabagas are best grown as a fall crop. When rutabagas develop and mature in hot weather, they do not develop typical sweetness and flavor.

Q. What causes turnips to fail to make large roots?

A. Crowded turnips will fail to enlarge. Turnips also require a moderately fertile soil and adequate moisture to grow large, fleshy roots. Plant in the spring as soon as the ground can be worked. For a fall crop, plant when daytime temperatures average below 80 degrees F.

Q. Are there varieties of turnips grown just for the tops?

- A. The varieties Alltop and Shogoin are grown primarily for their tops and usually fail to make large, high-quality roots.

Q. My plants appear to be stunted and have small, round galls on the roots.

- A. This is root-knot nematodes. It is controlled by rotation, summer fallowing and chemical treatment.

Q. How do you control aphids or plant lice on turnips?

- A. Aphids can be easily controlled with an insecticide. Begin application the first time insects are observed and repeat periodically.

Q. What causes my turnip greens to often have a bitter and pungent flavor?

- A. Conditions which result in slow growth or stress will cause the leaves to have a bitter off-flavor. This condition is prevalent when turnip leaves mature under high temperatures and unfavorable growing conditions.

Q. I recently harvested my turnips and found the root black in the center.

- A. This most often is the result of boron deficiency.

Q. Are turnips and rutabagas the same plant just with different names?

- A. No. Turnips are very old vegetables dating back thousands of years, while rutabagas were not mentioned prior to the 16th century in Europe. Turnips have 20 chromosomes while rutabagas have 38, suggesting a cross between cabbage (18 chromosomes) and turnips (20 chromosomes) resulting in the higher chromosome number.