

Home Gardening Series

# Parsnip

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Vegetables

## Environment

**Light** – sunny/partial shade

**Soil** – well-drained loam

**Fertility** – rich

**pH** – 5.8 to 7.5

**Temperature** – cool

**Moisture** – moist

## Culture

**Planting** – seed, early spring or  
late summer

**Spacing** – 2 to 3 inches

**Hardiness** – cool-season biennial

**Fertilizer** – heavy

## Parsnip – *Pastinaca sativa*

Parsnip is a biennial native to Eurasia that grows wild in most parts of Europe and in the Caucasus. It was known to the ancient Greeks and Romans, but the fleshy forms used today were probably developed in the Middle Ages.

Parsnip is a hardy, full-season annual plant grown for its long, tapered root that resembles a white carrot. It is considered a winter vegetable, because its flavor is not fully developed until the roots have been exposed to near freezing temperatures for two to four weeks in the fall and early winter. The starch in the parsnip roots then changes to sugar, resulting in a sweet, nutlike flavor.



## Cultural Practices

### Planting Time

Plant seed in early March or August in a deep, well-prepared, fertile soil. Parsnip seed is short-lived. You must obtain a fresh supply each year. The best parsnips are grown in the fall.

### Spacing and Depth of Planting

Plant seeds 1/2 to 3/4 inch deep. To assure a good stand, plant two to three seeds per inch of row. Space rows 18 to 24 inches apart. Parsnip seed is slow to germinate, and some gardeners drop a radish seed every inch to mark the row and help break the soil crust. Thin seedlings to 2 to 4 inches apart. When the plants are too far apart, the roots become large and the edible portion develops a woody, fibrous texture.

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## Cultivars

Crop	Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Seed Per 100 Feet of Row	Disease Resistance or Tolerance	Remarks
Parsnip	All American	110	1/8 ounce		Smooth, white roots; broad at the shoulders and hollow crowned. Excellent keeper.
	Hollow Crown	125	1/8 ounce		Long, well-tapered roots, up to 18 inches long.
	Andover	120	1/8 ounce	Brown canker (resistant)	Slim, gradually tapered, firm root. Keeps four to six months.
	Javelin Hybrid		1/8 ounce	Brown canker (resistant)	Slim, smooth, tapered roots.
	Harris Model	120	1/8 ounce		Longer, slimmer roots than 'Hollow Crown.' Smooth, white roots with tapered shape.
	Gladiator Hybrid	120	1/8 ounce		Large, 'Hollow Crown' type; smooth, white skin with vigorous tops and rounded shoulders. Excellent taste, very sweet. Stores four to five months.

## Care

Parsnip is closely related to carrots and is grown in a similar manner. Keep young parsnip plants free of weeds by shallow hoeing or cultivation.

## Harvesting

Parsnip should remain in the ground until the tops freeze in late fall. At this time, the roots may be harvested and stored or left in the garden to be used as needed. Gardeners who do not have storage facilities often mulch parsnip with straw so it can be harvested throughout the winter. Like beets and carrots, parsnip may be stored in outdoor vegetable pits or underground cellars or under refrigeration at 32 degrees F with high (95 percent) humidity. Dig the roots (usually 1 1/2 to 2 inches in diameter and 7 to 8 inches long) with a spading fork. Yields frequently exceed 1 pound per foot of row.

## Common Problems

Low soil fertility is a common problem. It can usually be overcome by side-dressing with a complete fertilizer in late May or October. Parsnip is relatively free of both insects and diseases.

## Frequently Asked Question

### Q. What is parsnip?

A. Parsnip is commonly grown in Europe and in many northern areas of the United States. It is grown for its delicate-tasting, carrot-like roots that can grow up to 15 inches long and 3 to 4 inches across at the top. The plants are biennials but are grown as annuals and should be harvested before the second year's leaves start to grow.