



Growing Parsnips

Number 0012

February 18, 2010



Parsnips Need Frost

Parsnips are not even grown in the south because they need frost to develop a good taste. You plant them by seed as soon as the ground can be worked and harvest them after frost and right into the winter.

Growing Parsnips

The seeds of Parsnips do not stay viable very long so it is wise to use new seeds every year. They like very light well drained soil with no rocks. One way to grow them is to drive a metal stake into the ground about 10 inches or so, then wiggle it around to form a cone shaped hole. Fill the hole with potting soil and plant the seeds in the centre. Using this method, you might get parsnips the size of small turkeys.

After a couple of months, the plants will need thinning down with scissors to the strongest ones at least 4 inches apart. In cold weather they take a long time to germinate, so it is useful to plant radishes with them to mark their location. Mulching and hilling around the plants to protect the root tops from light is a good practice. They will grow best if kept clear of weeds and kept evenly moist.

Harvesting

Ideally the roots stay in the ground all winter and are harvested in the following early spring but they can also be picked after the frost comes in the fall. To avoid getting them frozen solid in the ground, they should be covered for the winter with a foot deep blanket of leaves. It should be possible, this way, to retrieve them throughout the winter. You need to pick them before they start growing again in the spring because they will start to get woody and lose their flavour.

Varieties to Plant

Parsnips can get carrot rust fly, carrot weevil, cutworms, flea beetles, leaf hoppers, nematodes and spider mites. There are also some foliar diseases. Here is a reference from the [PEI Department of Agriculture](http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/diseases/insects/parsnips/) on diseases and insects of parsnips.

Storage

Cut off the leaves, wash and dry. They can be frozen or stored in damp sand in a cool place.

Learn more about growing parsnips from the Cornell University site www.gardening.cornell.edu >

Learn more about parsnips on [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parsnip) >