



CARROTS AND PARSNIPS

What is It?

- Parsnips and carrots are root vegetables from the Apiaceae family.
- Parsnips and carrots get sweeter after a frost because cold weather turns their starch into sugar.
- Parsnips can have such high sugar content that they were used to sweeten desserts before sugar was widely available.
- Parsnips are native to Eurasia and have been cultivated by humans for at least 2,000 years.
- Carrots originated in Central Asia over a thousand years ago and were purple to black and much woodier in texture. Dutch farmers in the 1600s bred the first orange carrots.
- Washington is the fourth largest producer of carrots that are sold fresh and the largest producer of carrots grown for processing.
- Baby-cut carrots are made from full-grown, thin carrots by peeling and cutting them to the desired size and shape.
- The average person eats 17 pounds of carrots per year.

Grow It

Carrots can be seeded directly in the garden four weeks before the last frost. Some shorter varieties are suitable for container planting.

Carrot seeds are small and can be difficult for children to evenly space when planting. Seed tape, on which carrot seeds are glued, can be helpful for planting carrots with kids.

Carrots are a biennial plant. In the first year, the plant forms foliage and the taproot, which we eat. In the second year, the plant grows larger foliage, flowers, and seeds. Consider leaving a carrot in the ground over the winter to see the carrot's interesting flower the second summer.

Parsnips are cool season vegetables that prefer sunny locations and fertile, deep, well-drained soils. Incorporate plenty of organic matter and an all-purpose fertilizer into the soil before planting. Plant seeds 1/4–1/2 inch deep. Thin seedling parsnips to three inches apart in a row, with rows 12–18 inches apart. Plant two to three weeks before the last frost.

Parsnips taste best when plants have been exposed to several weeks of cool, frosty weather. Harvest parsnips once the roots reach desired size—typically about five to ten inches long.



Make It

Be sure to follow local Food Safety rules and regulations. Learn more here: [Food Safety Rules and Regulations | Washington State Department of Health](#).

Recipe: Carrot Salad
Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 large carrots, scrubbed or peeled • juice of one lime and grated zest of half a lime • 1 tsp honey • 1/2 cup chopped fresh mint leaves • 1/2 cup roasted sunflower seeds or peanuts (optional) • 1/2 tsp salt 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grate the carrots on the large holes of a box grater. 2. In a medium bowl, stir together in the lime juice, zest, honey, salt, and mint until combined. 3. Add the grated carrots and peanuts. Stir to combine. 4. Serve right away or store, covered in the refrigerator, up to three days.

Recipe source: [Chop Chop](#).

Explore interactive taste test resources to encourage participants to try what you made!
[Taste-Testing Event Resources](#)



Carrots, credit: WSDA



C is for Carrot

Learn It

Grades K–3

Objectives

This lesson discusses the parts, growing cycle, attributes, and health benefits of carrots. Students demonstrate their learning by creating a poem or song about carrots. Students will be able to:

- Use their five senses to explore, describe, and draw a diagram of a carrot.
- Identify the parts of a carrot plant and how carrots are grown.
- Describe why carrots are good for their bodies/health.
- Create a fun poem or song about carrots.

Materials

- Grade-level appropriate book about carrots. Recommendations: *Carrot Soup*, by John Segal, *The Giant Carrot*, by Jan Peck, and *Carrots Grow Underground*, by Mari Schuh.
- One bunch of carrots with green leaves attached. If available, pick carrots from your school garden for the activity.
- White board or butcher paper.
- Roasted Washington-grown carrots and/or raw carrot sticks for taste test. If possible, use different varieties that are different colors such as purple, orange, and yellow.

Directions

1. Story: Read a story about carrots to students and discuss what happened in the story.
2. Explore: Show students a real carrot (including the green stem and leaves). Invite students to name the plant parts visible (root, stem, leaves) and the function of each.
 - a. Roots anchor plants and draw nutrients and moisture.
 - b. Stems move moisture and nutrients throughout the plant.
 - c. Leaves are the main location for photosynthesis.
3. Discuss
 - a. Prompt students to contemplate:
 - i. Which plant part are we eating when we eat a carrot?
 - ii. How does a carrot grow—above the ground or under the ground?
 - iii. Carrots thrive in cool weather and get sweeter after they've experienced frost. How do you think this impacts their success as a crop in Washington?
 - b. For younger students:
 - i. Ask them to describe the carrot that you are holding up and record their descriptions on the board (orange, long, skinny, roots, green, grows underground, dirty, bunnies like to eat).





C is for Carrot

Learn It

Directions

- i. Review the five senses and pass around the carrots for students to explore. Record additional descriptive words on the board.
- a. For older students:
 - i. Pass out one carrot per small group and have them draw a detailed diagram of the carrot with labels. Cut a carrot open lengthwise so that they can draw the cross section for comparison. Have them record descriptive words next to their diagram.

4. Brain break with "Carrot Yoga"!

- a. Start as a seed curled into a tiny ball then slowly stand up tall and reach your arms into the sky as a growing seedling.
- b. Next, lie on your back in a ball and stretch your legs into the sky to represent the leaves growing out of the ground.

5. Connect: Ask students why they think carrots are a healthy food to eat. Inform them that:

- a. Carrots are packed with vitamin A to help your skin and eyesight and that they give you "X-Ray eyes" (make binoculars with your hands around your eyes)!
- b. They also contain fiber to help with digestion and keep you full.
- c. They contain vitamin C to prevent you from getting sick. Carrots are a super food! Pass around carrots for students to taste. Do a class "cheers to carrots" and then crunch together. Have students record additional descriptive words based on the taste and texture of the carrots (record on the board with younger students).

- #### 6. Creative Writing: Using the long list of descriptive words generated by the students and facts discussed during class, have students create a poem or song about carrots. This can be done in small groups or together as a class. Share the poems and songs in your class and/or present to other classes to spread the excitement about eating carrots! Students could also come up with a list of fun names for carrots or ways to enjoy carrots at snack time, breakfast, lunch, or dinner.





Eat It

Parsnips are a great source of fiber which aids in digestion and helps the stomach feel full. Parsnips contain manganese, potassium, and are high in vitamin C, vitamin K, and vitamin B9.

Carrots are well known for containing high amounts of beta carotene, which the body uses to make vitamin A. Beta carotene is important for eyesight, skin, and cell growth and may also help reduce chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease. Beta carotene was first discovered in carrots, which is how it got its name—carot-ene.



Read It

- Tops and Bottoms, by Janet Stevens
- Carrots Grow Underground, by Mari Schuh
- The Giant Carrot, by Jan Peck Carrots
- Oliver's Vegetables, by Vivian French
- Carrot Soup, by John Segal
- The Giant Carrot, by Jan Peck

More About It

- Lesson for 3rd–5th Grade [Vegetables: Tops and Bottoms – Curriculum Matrix | Washington Agriculture in the Classroom](#)
- Lesson for Preschool from South Dakota State University Extension: extension.sdstate.edu/sites/default/files/2024-04/S-0001-12-Carrot-Preschool.pdf
- Lesson for 1st grade from North Carolina State University Extension: [Lesson-Plans-Carrots-Carrots-Everywhere.pdf](#)
- Youth and adult lesson about parsnips from South Dakota State University Extension: [Parsnip - Schools and Adults](#)

This resource was adapted for Washington state from Montana Harvest of the Month Classroom Bites: Carrots. [HOM21 Carrots Teacher.pdf](#)