

# The East London Garden Society

## Plant Facts

### Parsnip



#### What is a Parsnip?

Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) is a biennial plant, which means that it blooms on its second year and then dies afterwards. It is a member of the Apaiaceae family, which also includes the carrot, dill, cumin, parsley and caraway.

A parsnip has a strong resemblance to the carrot, and many confuse the two. The only difference is that a carrot is typically orange whilst a parsnip has a lighter colour hue.

Historically, the parsnip has been cultivated by ancient civilizations such as the Greeks and Romans.

However, there are not many details to be found, because at one point, they were categorized as carrots due to their similar appearances.

Parsnip is typically planted before the winter season because that's the time it produces its unique, sweet flavour. A fully mature parsnip plant can grow up to a height of 1.5 metres tall. It's a favourite among gardeners who favour cultivating crops with short growing seasons.

#### The Benefits of Parsnip?

Recent studies on parsnip have shed light on some of its health benefits. The most prominent ones include:

*Improved Heart Health* - Parsnip contains a generous amount of potassium, thereby reducing blood pressure and stress on your heart. It also contains folate, which helps reduce homocysteine levels in your blood that are linked to heart disease.

*Good Source of Fibre* - Parsnip is known for being a great source of soluble fibre, which can help reduce your bad cholesterol levels and risk of diabetes. In addition, it can help improve your digestive health by helping food move smoothly through your intestines, which can help reduce constipation and other common digestive disorders. The great thing about growing parsnip is that it is a hardy plant and can survive the cold winter months without much of a problem.

## Starting Out

When starting to plant parsnip, remember that you should always sow fresh seeds to cultivate the best harvest. Place two seeds per inch, one-half inch deep into the soil. Before you place the seeds, make sure the soil is loosened to a depth of 12 to 15 inches, because parsnip can reach that length as it grows downward. Finally, add in a layer of compost, around two to four inches on the soil bed. In about two to three weeks, seedlings will emerge.

## Harvesting Parsnip

Parsnip seedlings usually take sixteen weeks to mature. They'll be ready for harvesting when the foliage is just starting to die down in the late summer or autumn. You can also leave a few plants during the winter months, so you still have enough parsnip to eat during the cold season. In addition, lightly frosted roots typically produce the best flavour.

## Maintenance

As the seedlings mature, you need to thin them and provide three to six inches of space between each one to encourage a healthy yield. Also, if you plan to leave some parsnip on the ground during and after winter, cover them with mulch and harvest them immediately the snow thaws.

You need to watch out for a few diseases when growing parsnip, such as a carrot fly infestation. A carrot fly is small, has a black body, and its larvae feed on carrot roots. Once larvae have burrowed into a parsnip, you need to throw out the destroyed crop. You can prevent an infestation by surrounding your plants with a two-foot high polythene barrier.

Parsnip canker, a term for a rotting parsnip plant, is another problem. It usually occurs due to drought, over-rich soil or damage by poor handling. To prevent parsnip canker, simply be careful with your plant's maintenance and ensure proper soil irrigation.