

Long Carrots for Exhibition

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**The National Vegetable Society
Scottish Branch**



Growing Area

Over the years I have experimented with various methods of growing long carrots, including pipes, poly sleeves and drums. I now use 45 gallon oil drums which have the top and bottom cut out to give me a cylinder. This is placed on top of a raised bed 18 inches high and with another 18 inches below the ground level. The bed and the drum is filled with concreting sand to give me an overall depth of around 66 inches. I consider that drums are easier to work with as they make the watering more controllable. In my view very few people have mastered the art of growing top quality carrots in pipes or similar means - the exception being Joe Proudlock. The drums are situated under cover in a polytunnel that is used exclusively for long carrots. Each drum is placed on top of a support that allows the sand to be dug away at lifting time. I grow 32 barrels, which with 4 carrots in each barrel gives me 128 to choose from. I am convinced that you need the carrots under cover to achieve top quality - this affords them protection from pests, wind and allows you to control the watering. In addition it gives you a better temperature in the early and late stages of growth. Scientific research has also shown that the best colour in a carrot is when the temperature is between 16 and 21 centigrade, so having them under cover will allow you to achieve this on cooler days



At the end of each year I completely empty each of the drums and the raised beds , trying to remove as much of the old compost core as possible. I also give the sand a drenching with Jeyes Fluid before refilling all the drums. This allows any bugs or nasties to be controlled and also puts some air back into the sand. You must do this at least 4– 6 weeks before you plan to sow as the sand will settle a fair bit.



Seed and Varieties

The only variety to use is New Red Intermediate. I have kept my own seed for around 10 years which was originally seed from Graeme Watson. I plant around 16 - 20 each year for seed production. After returning from the shows I select those carrots that have a good colour, shape and size and keep them aside. They are wrapped up in cling film and kept in a cool shed until early January when they are then set away 3 to an 18 litre pot of multipurpose compost and placed in a frost free greenhouse. Only the top 10 inch or so is potted up with the rest cut off.



Around early April they are then moved into a polythene covered structure and the pots buried some 3-4 inches into the soil. This is where they remain until the seed is produced. Keep spraying at regular intervals with a proprietary insecticide. The flowers should start to develop around July—at this stage the flower heads should be still under cover but have open access to bees etc for pollination. At this stage there can be literally hundreds of flower heads on the carrots. I thin them down to leave only the biggest and most vigorous, discarding all others. Once the seed is pollinated and the head has dried off on the plant you can remove it and place it into a paper bag. Gently rub the seed off and then remove all the chaff to leave clean seed. I do this using a kitchen sieve. The seed can then be stored in an airtight container.



Sowing Date

I use one sowing date for all shows. This works for me as I have a large number to pick from and they do seem to mature at slightly different times, allowing me to cover all the shows I want. However as a minimum they need at least 20 weeks of growth. The sowing date I have been using almost since I started growing them 30 odd years ago is the 7th April. As I said this works for me in my area however it is important that you find the right date for your part of the country. At this stage of the year in Scotland temperatures are beginning to rise and hopefully the carrots come to no harm when germinating towards the end of April as most severe frosts are over.

Carrot Mix and Sowing

The mix I use is as follows

1 Bag Levington F1 Compost

1 Bag Silvaperl Silver Sand(Approx 20 litres)

12 ounces Elliots TEV 4 fertiliser

12 ounces Medwyns Fine Calcified Seaweed

3 ounces Superphosphates

I have only started adding superphosphates in the last couple of years as the NPK in Levingtons F1 altered, with the phosphates dropping quite a bit. The F1 is put through a 6 mm riddle to remove any rough compost, and the Calcified Seaweed and TEV 4 is put through a sieve to ensure no large pieces are in the mix. All of this is mixed thoroughly in a mixer. Dependent on how dry the compost is I may have to add water to bring it to a moist level.



I make my carrot mix at the same time as I am going to use it as I feel it gives it that bit more freshness, plus I always seemed to be pushed for time whilst working. The motto here being if it works don't break it!

I grow 4 carrots per barrel. There is a great deal of debate on whether boring or coring the holes is best. Personally I think that boring is the best as it gives you the conical shape you require whilst keeping the sides firm. I don't see the point of removing a core and then boring the hole with a pinch bar. The 4 growing stations are evenly spaced out—if they are half an inch out I have never come across a carrot that seems



worried by that. Again though each to their own and the method that works for you is the best. The bar I use is 66 inches long. Each station is bored to its maximum depth and to a diameter of 4 and a half inches at the top. The compost is then gently trickled into the borehole and once completely full is pressed down flat using the plastic

tub in picture. I then make an indentation in the middle with my index finger about half an inch deep and place 4 seed in each hole. The indentation is then filled with compost and flattened back down and watered well. Germination should take 2– 3 weeks dependent on temperature conditions. At this stage I keep the boreholes moist but not wet. Once the carrots have germinated I still keep them moist using a fine rose but try not to water over the young seedlings. Once they have reached around 2 inches I will thin them down. This is generally around the end of the first week in May





I thin my carrots down to one in one go. I am not always looking for the “best” seedling in the borehole but am looking across all the barrels to try and get them all at a consistent size if possible. I select the one I want and simply pull the remainder up gently. Some people will use scissors to cut the seedlings however I don’t see the point

of leaving any material to rot next to the good seedling. Done gently there is little disturbance to the seedling you want.

Growing On

From now on the carrots will make strong growth. Watering is dependent on temperature and conditions however I aim to keep the boreholes and the sand in the barrels moist. I use a hose with a very soft spray lance to water and go around the carrots—never water overhead. Each barrel will take roughly 30 seconds each time I water. Watering is not an exact science—just aim to keep the barrels moist. Each week I give the



foliage a spray with a proprietary insecticide to kill or deter any pests. I also spray the bottoms of the barrels and the beds they are sitting on. Once the carrots have reached around 12 inches I start to stake the foliage. It is important to do this as the foliage left unstaked will soon fall over and potentially break. I use split canes and

green plastic clips to make a cylinder for the foliage. I don’t use any supplementary feeding or foliar sprays right through to lifting, preferring to leave the carrots to find the nutrients in the boreholes.

I also keep an eye out for any secondary growths which are coming from the shoulder of the carrot and not the crown. It is important to remove these by snapping them off as soon as possible.

Pests and Diseases

Growing the carrots under cover I seldom see any problems with disease, although I always have a number that are weird shaped, split, or not just right. The main pests to deal with are Carrot Fly and Willow Aphid. Both of these will devastate your carrots if they are not controlled. By growing in a tunnel with an enclosed atmosphere I am seldom bothered with both pests as the protection given by the tunnel, together with a regular programme of spraying deters them. If you are growing outside I would suggest making a cover with Enviromesh and regular spraying to deter them. The signs of Willow Aphid are similar to carrot



fly with the foliage turning coppery red. You will find there is no damage to the roots but once attacked by Willow Aphid the plants seldom recover. In effect the aphids are sucking the life out of the carrot. Carrot Fly will damage the roots, making them useless for showing so it is imperative to protect them and start

spraying from a very early stage.

Lifting for Shows

When lifting carrots for a show I try and leave it to the last possible time. Freshness is paramount and although they can be lifted a few days before the show, if you can lift them as late as possible I feel it gives you an advantage. I will have a look at each carrot and by the growth on the foliage I gauge what carrots I think will be lifted. Once selected I carefully scrape away the borehole and sand around the carrot. This allows me to see the shape and size of the shoulder. Some shoulders will be round, where some will be more square in looks. So at this stage I am matching up the shoulders. I also measure the width of the shoulder and try and match the required number that have the same size and shoulder.

Once I have the number I need I start on releasing the tap root. Over the years I have tried all sorts of methods to get the tap root out completely. I have never managed to get the complete root out without breaking it by just pulling the carrot. To combat this as previously said I have the barrels sitting on supports. This allows me to scrape the sand away below each borehole to find the taproot. Using water to liquefy the sand I can then follow the tap root down as far as I can get my arm and gently release it. I then trim the foliage to about 6 inches and gently pull the carrot up. Using this method I very rarely have tap root breakages. To me



the tap root being intact is an essential part of the carrot. Without it my view is you should lose points on condition and uniformity. Once the carrot has been lifted I then give it a dip in a wheelie bin full of clean water and then inspect it for any damage etc. If it is ok I then place it on a long table covered with towels and then keep pulling until I get the set I am looking for.

Once I have the set I then give them a gentle wash with a soft sponge in a barrel of clean water. You should never have to rub a carrot to clean any marks etc. Washing them too aggressively will cause them to mark, which will be magnified once you put them down on the show bench. I make sure that the shoulders around the crown of the carrot are also cleaned, sometimes having to use a sharp knife to remove any dirt etc.

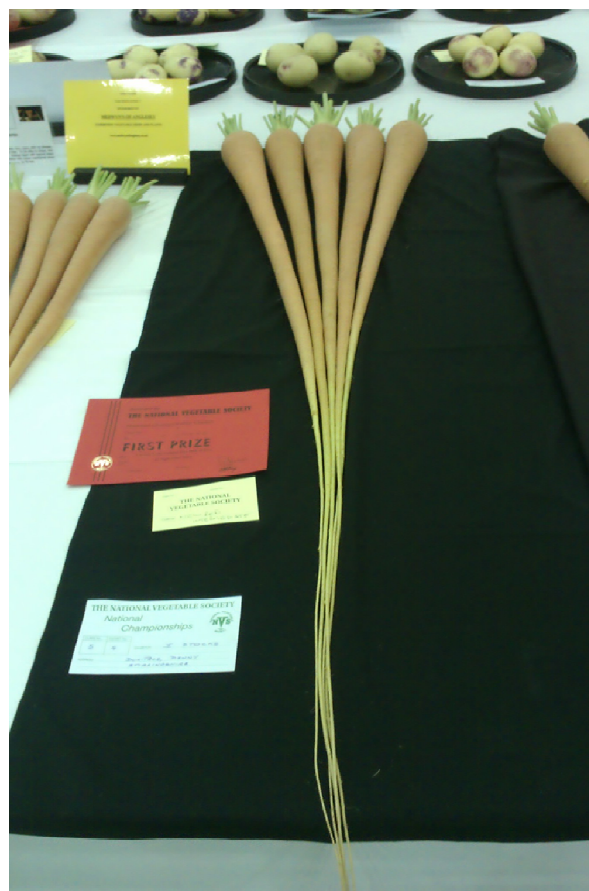


I then spray each individual carrot with clean water and then wrap them up in cling film. This keeps the carrot fresh for transportation. To transport them to the show I use boxes 5 ft 6 inches long which are lined with towels and other soft material. Place them in the boxes without them touching each other and make sure they are secure and cannot roll about.



Once at the show I like to find a table out of the way that you can work at. Make sure the table is covered with towels. Each carrot is then placed on the table in it's set. I remove the cling film and then take my time to remove all the fine hairs that will be on the body of the carrot. I will then place a black cloth(if permitted by the schedule) on to the area in the class where I want to stage the carrots. If I am returning before judging commences I will wrap the cling film back on to the carrots to keep them fresh and remove it just before the time for clearing the hall. If not I will make sure the carrots are sprayed with water and then place the cling film over them. This allows the steward to remove the cling film easily. I will then trim each carrot's foliage to 76 mm using sharp scissors. Whichever way you stage them it is important to keep them damp as long as possible. Once a carrot dries you will see every little mark going!

So once you have staged your carrots that's it! It's now in the hands of the judges who will be looking for condition, size, shape, colour and uniformity. So remember it is a combination of all of these criteria you are looking for, not just one such as size. Hopefully you will return to a ticket but if not remember you have had the pleasure of growing one of the best exhibition vegetables—so enjoy it!



NVS National Championships 2014 Harrogate
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