

Establishing Root Crops

Introduction Root crops are usually established by direct sowing of the seeds into the bed where they are to grow and mature. The reason for this is that transplanting could result in the taproot being broken, which would result in misshapen vegetables that are often unusable. This is particularly true of long rooted vegetables like carrots and parsnips.

My Problem When I sow carrots outside in a bed they germinate, but then disappear. Something eats them before they grow any true leaves. This happens even when the crop is grown under enviromesh and dusted with derris (a natural insecticide permitted in organic production) . I do not believe that slugs are to blame.

My solution I now sow carrots in paper tubes and plant them out when the plants are established. The whole tube is planted, the paper rots as the roots develop.

I have tried root trainers but have found it more difficult to plant out the plants without breaking the taproots.

How We Grow Carrots Paper tubes are made from half broadsheet or single tabloid newspaper pages. These are folded in half and rolled round a piece of 32mm dowel and fixed with selotape.

These are stood in a suitable container, straight sided is better than tapering. They are then filled with compost, using a teaspoon. We put bedding compost in the bottom $\frac{3}{4}$ of the tube and top them up with seed compost.

Several seeds are sown in each tube and then they are thinned to one (or at most 2 seedlings) per tube. They are germinated in the greenhouse or polytunnel making sure the paper does not dry out.

A useful tip if you want to thin seedlings in tubes, root trainers or plug pots is to use scissors to cut out the surplus plants rather than pulling them out; so avoiding disturbing the roots of those you want to keep.

Other root crops. We have tried parsnips would be successful using the method described above with some success.

I have transplanted beetroot. The top part of the root is the useful part of the beetroot so a broken taproot is less of a disaster.

These are planted into modules and carefully planted out when there are four leaves. I find that the crop establishes better than with direct sown crops and allows an earlier crop to be established as seeds can be sown from mid March onwards.

We have not tried transplanting turnips or swedes has anyone else any experience?

Footnote;

One year we inadvertently carried out an interesting experiment We intended to save enough loo roll centres and use them instead of newspaper tubes but found that we did not have enough so reverted to newspaper tubes we had used before for about half the main sowing.

The three varieties of carrots we grew were sown in both sorts of tube on the same day and were treated identically. All the seeds germinated at about the same time and initially were equally vigorous. However about a month after planting those in the newspaper tubes were twice the size of those in the loo roll centres.

Has anyone had a similar experience and can anyone suggest an explanation/ Are loo rolls made with a toxic glue?

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