

How To Thin Carrots

Carrots and other similar root crops are almost always seeded too closely together. It's a difficult task to kill the plants that you grew on purpose, especially for beginners. It is worth it though as carrots and other roots crops will not grow to maturity unless they have space to do so. Carrots are hard to transplant and not really worth the effort.

Thinning means removing some of the baby plants in a row or patch to free up space so that the rest can grow to full size. Ideally, thin carrots twice during the course of the season. The first thinning frees up space. The second and subsequent thinning(s) yield delicious carrots.

To thin, hold the carrot plant between your forefinger and thumb at the soil level. Pull firmly to dislodge the entire plant from the soil by the root. Mound more soil around the roots of the leftover plants. Carrots will discolor if the top of their root is exposed to sunlight.

Begin your first thinning when the plants are 3-4 inches tall. Remove the small and twisted plants first, or those that are growing right on top of one another. Thin the rest of the plants to about a half-inch apart.

Thin the carrots for a second time about a month later to about an inch apart. You can achieve this easily by harvesting every other carrot, which may be large enough to eat as a snack. Baby carrots are a delicious addition to salads and are also sweet and tender when roasted. You can juice or make smoothies with the thinning, tops and all!

Thinning schedule at-a-glance

Week 4: 1st thinning

Cull out bad-looking ones first. Aim for a half inch spacing between carrots.

Week 6 or 7: 2nd thinning

Harvest every other baby carrot, leaving about an inch between remaining plants. *You can stop here and thin no more until harvest, or...*

Week 8 or 9: 3rd thinning

Harvest every other nearly full sized carrot.

Week 10 or 11: Harvest the rest, full-sized!



The 1st thinning requires delicate hands and ruthless killing. Thin to about 1/2 inch apart.



3rd thinning

A few weeks after the 2nd thinning, remove every other small, tender carrot to allow for full-sized carrots before fall frost.

Overwintering carrots

Carrots store well in a cool, moist and dark place like a cool basement, stored in sand or sawdust, or in a bag in the refrigerator drawer. They can be left in the garden all winter if they're protected with mulch. The tops will die but the roots remain sweet! For a sweet winter harvest, shovel off the snow and ice, lift the mulch and gently loosen the unfrozen soil to harvest. Be sure to harvest the carrots before spring as this biennial crop becomes woody as it races to make seed in year two.

