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What Is The Secret To Getting Carrots To Germinate?

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A weekly question/answer column

What Is The Secret To Getting Carrots To Germinate?

Dan Drost answers:*

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Q. What is the secret to getting carrots to germinate? It seems that in keeping them wet, I wash away the thin layer of soil over them, no matter how fine the spray. Also, can they be grown in a wide row?

A. Yes, carrot stand establishment can be a problem and getting adequate plant stands is difficult. The difficulty is that carrots are slow to germinate and often take from 10-14 days to get the seed root to show. It then takes another week to get the seed leaves to emerge. This slow germination requires different planting methods to ensure that stands of adequate number are achieved. If the seed is not stored properly, germination is reduced. Start with good seed, a well prepared seedbed and try not to seed too heavily.

Your approach of trying to keep the seeds moist means lots of time and effort spent in the garden. Here is a better approach:

- Prepare your planting area by sowing your seeds on the surface of the soil. Moisten the area and then cover the soil surface with burlap bags, an old piece of carpet, old pieces of board or plywood or any other material. You want to have a moist soil surface that doesn't dry out.
- After a few days, periodically check to see if the seed is germinating. Once you see the seed leaves you can remove the covers. However, don't take the covers off completely but use them to shield the plants from the sun for a few days. Seedlings grown this way are more tender and need to be hardened off a little.
- You can use these methods on rows or wide beds. I grow my carrots on beds because they take up less space and are easier to care for throughout the season. Once up and established, you can thin them out a bit.
- As you get used to this method, you will have to refine your seeding practice since most gardeners over-seed carrots just to get a few to emerge.

* Dan Drost is Utah State University Extension Vegetable Specialist