



Campaign for School Gardening



Crop Sheet: Radishes

Description

Latin name: *Raphanus sativa*

Raphanus = Greek for 'easily raised', sativa = cultivated/ farmed.

Radish is from the Latin 'radix' meaning root.

The radish is a quick-growing crop producing tasty roots.

They can be ready to eat just 4-8 weeks after sowing the seed, depending on the time of year when sown (i.e. you will get a very quick crop when you sow in the summer months). In schools, do not sow after the end of June or they will crop in August when you are on summer holidays.

The flavour of radishes can range from mild to quite peppery.

They also come in a range of colours, not only the pink-red ones we see in the shops, but also white, purple and black.



Whilst we eat the roots of this salad crop, it is actually in the same family as the cabbage, known as brassicas. Other edible roots in the cabbage family include turnips and swedes.

It is also related to mustard, often sharing its strong taste.

History

The radish originated from both Asia and the eastern Mediterranean regions.

It has a long history as a crop, being grown by the Egyptians more than 4000 years ago (before 2000BC). It is thought that the Egyptians grew them to make radish-seed oil. This oil was widely used before olive trees were introduced to Egyptian soil.

The Chinese have grown radishes since 500BC. Both the Greeks and Romans grew radishes.

In the UK we did not develop a taste for the radish until much later, in the sixteenth century.

Interesting Facts About Radishes

Radishes are now grown all over the world. They can be eaten raw or cooked (steamed or stir-fried).

Giant radishes (known as daikon or mouli) are regularly used in Asian cookery. The Chinese mash them up and mix with flour to make Chinese dough cake and the Japanese slice or grate them to add to many of their dishes.

In the UK we can grow winter radishes, as well as the quick-growing salad varieties we usually see in the shops.

Not all radishes are grown for their roots. The 'rats-tail' radish is grown in south-east Asia for its leaves and edible seed pods.

Radishes are a good source of vitamin C. Summer radish should be harvested and eaten when young so that they do not become woody.

(Sources: 'RHS Fruit & Vegetable Gardening' by Michael Pollock; 'Whole Foods Companion' by Dianne Onstad;

'The New Oxford Book of Food Plants' by J.C. Vaughan & C.A. Geissler, 'Food Plants of the World: An Illustrated Guide' by Ben-Erik van Wyk and website www.eattheseasons.co.uk.)

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How to Grow Radishes

Growing conditions

Radishes like fertile, moisture-retentive soil. Open, sunny sites are best, but they can still be grown in semi-shade.

When to grow

Autumn Term (September)

In schools, summer varieties can still be sown in early September for late autumn harvest. Alternatively try sowing hardier winter varieties which can be harvested throughout the winter months

Spring/ Summer Terms

Sow and harvest regularly to make the most of this fast-growing crop.

Can be sown fortnightly from late February to July. Sow little and often to keep a regular crop and do not allow them to stay in the ground to mature or they will become woody and inedible.

As radishes are quick to mature they can be used as a 'catch crop' being sown between rows of slower-growing vegetables such as parsnips and potatoes. This can help to illustrate the difference in germination rates to pupils.

How to grow

Sow little and often, direct in the soil. Use a hoe or the point of a trowel to make a drill (line in the soil) 1cm deep. If the soil is very dry water the drill before sowing the seeds. Sprinkle the radish seeds thinly along the row (2cm apart). If growing more than one row allow 15cm between rows.

Radishes can also be grown in containers. Fill the pot with compost to 2cm from the top, sprinkle the seeds sparingly over the surface and cover with 1cm of compost.

Early sowings of summer varieties (February and March) should be protected with cloches or fleece. Such sowings will provide you with an early crop in April/ May.

Water well, especially during dry periods.

Winter varieties need more space, so sow seeds 20cm apart and allow 30cm between rows.

Harvesting

Pull summer varieties as required, making sure they are never left to mature and become woody. Try to eat them as fresh as possible but if the leaves are removed they can be kept in the fridge for up to a week.

Winter cultivars can be left in the ground and dug up as required.



Pest and Disease Problems

Flea beetle, slugs and snails may all like to share your radish crop. Flea beetle eats lots of small holes in the leaves, to minimise attack keep your crop well watered as the flea beetle thrives in dry soil, or cover with fleece. The main pest is the cabbage root fly; these can be deterred by growing your crop under a layer of fleece or under cloches or in summer, use insect-proof mesh.

(Refer to RHS website gardening advice for examples of pests and diseases).

Varieties to Try: Summer: 'Cherry Belle' (round red), 'French Breakfast' (long crimson and white), 'Purple Plum' (purple), 'White Icicle' (white). Winter: 'Black Spanish Round' (black skin), 'Mantanghong' (red).

(Sources: RHS Fruit & Vegetable Gardening by Michael Pollock & RHS Website 'Grow Your Own Veg' www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/crops/index.asp)