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Horseradish Growing Guide

Horseradish (*Amoracia rusticana*) is a widely adapted and cold-tolerant hardy perennial plant that produces well in USDA zones 3 through 9.

When planted in early spring, the roots can be harvested in late fall, through the first autumn frosts. Once peeled and finely ground or shredded, homegrown prepared horseradish keeps well and adds a wonderful punch to everyday dishes along with many beneficial antioxidant compounds and minerals.

Planting

Horseradish grows easily if you heed its preference for deep, well-draining fertile soil with a good supply of organic matter. Plants prefer full sun, but can take some light shade in the afternoon. Plant as soon as soil can be worked in spring.

Plant roots 2 feet apart. Set each one at a 45-degree angle, flat end up, with the top 2 inches below the soil line. Keep evenly moist while plants become established. Back fill the planting holes and mound more soil over them which will allow easier harvesting in the fall.

ON ARRIVAL: When roots arrive, plan to plant them just as soon as the ground can be worked in early spring.

If you need to store them for short time, wrap them in slightly damp sphagnum moss or damp newspapers and store them in the refrigerator. Keep damp with good air circulation until you can plant them.

Note: Horseradish roots are notorious spreaders, so plant in an isolated area, or at the end of a garden bed. To really contain the plants, sink a big pot, (at least 12 inches tall and 16 to 18 inches in diameter) with its bottom cut out into the ground. Fill the pot with well-drained rich soil, and plant your horseradish roots into it. Thoroughly loosen and work the soil where you're going to plant horseradish to a depth of 12 inches and mix in several shovelfuls of good compost or well-aged organic matter.

Care

For best yields, plants should be well watered throughout the summer. Mulching is a good strategy to maintain soil moisture. Keep well weeded when young; once established, horseradish plants will usually out-compete most weeds. Foliage can reach 2 to 3 feet tall over the course of the first season. If plants produce sprays of white flowers, remove them to redirect energy to the roots and avoid unwanted seeding.

Harvesting and Storage

Horseradish grows and develops its roots in early fall; cool soil improves root quality and flavor, so wait to harvest until tops have died back in late fall; after first frost is ideal. If in a mild climate, wait until the winter holidays to dig and enjoy. Overwintered plants can also be harvested in early spring before the plants leaf out, but roots will have stronger pungency and can be a little woody.

It's best to dig, divide and replant horse-radish every 2-3 seasons to prevent the plants from becoming woody and to control the plants from multiplying and spreading.

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