

Sheboygan Avenue Community Garden

June Newsletter

Carrots and Cucumbers

Over the last year, I've been asked more questions about carrots and cucumbers than any other vegetables. Admittedly, I'm not an expert on either. If anything, I can tell you what *not* to do for growing carrots.

Growing Carrots

After seeing nothing for weeks and weeks from my first planting of carrot seeds, I saw my first carrot leaf emerge today. I guess I was too impatient with the first planting and had already planted a replacement row.

To give you some sound advice, I did a few web searches and this is what I found:

1. Carrots have a relatively long germination period of 7 to 21 days. If planted early, such as mid-April, the germination period could be longer since carrots need a soil temperature of at least 45 degrees to germinate.
2. There are a number of methods for seeding. One is to plant one tiny seed every 2 to 4 inches in a row. A second method is to overseed, such as 10 seeds per inch, and then thin. A third method is to mix the seeds with sand and scatter them. If these three methods seem to be too much work, carrot seeds are available on tapes.
3. Carrots grow best in deep, fertile, and well-drained soil. Avoid clay soils. I suggest testing an area by pushing a shovel into the ground. If you can push the head of the shovel all of the way in, carrots will likely grow well. You might wish to mix compost into the soil to a depth of 8 to 12 inches. However, too much nitrogen will encourage top growth.
4. Carrots grow well and the flavor is the best if the soil temperatures are 60 to 65 degrees. This often corresponds to air temperatures up to 75 degrees. Color and flavor decrease with higher temperatures.
5. Carrots come in a number of varieties and colors. Some varieties, such as Danvers, store well but may not be as favorable as Nantes, for example. Red carrots have been cultivated for 5000 years.
6. Carrots grow well with onions or chives. Consider alternating rows. The onions repel insects that prey on carrots. Don't plant near dill. There is mixed information on planting near tomatoes.
7. Cooked carrots may be healthier for you than raw carrots. Cooking makes it easier for the beta-carotene to be released to your body from the cells of the carrot.

Growing Cucumbers

Last year, I and a number of other gardeners had their cucumber plants shrivel up and die. Looking at the UW-Extension Horticulture website, I'm guessing the plants were attacked by a bacterial wilt organism spread by cucumber beetles.

Cucumber beetles are attracted to the cucumber by a chemical produced by the plant. Female striped cucumber beetles lay their eggs in the soil at the base of the plant.

Covering the cucumber plants with floating row cover, a very light weight fabric, is recommended to keep the beetles from coming in contact with the plant. The floating row cover is removed after the plants start to flower so that bees may help pollinate the plants.

I've read in an email from another community garden that mulching near the base of the plant discourages the female striped cucumber beetle from laying eggs around that plant. Mulching may be worth a try.

Spring Recipe: Rhubarb BBQ Sauce

The garden has a rhubarb patch that everyone can harvest from, so why not try out a savory rhubarb recipe this year instead of the standard strawberry rhubarb pie?

This recipe was originally published by *Cooking Light*.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon butter
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 ¼ cups of sliced rhubarb (1/2 inch)
- ½ cup water
- ⅓ cup sugar
- ¼ cup ketchup
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- ½ teaspoon chipotle chile powder
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ⅛ teaspoon salt

Directions

Step 1

Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and garlic; cook 5 minutes or until onion is tender, stirring occasionally. Add rhubarb; cook 3 minutes or until rhubarb is translucent, stirring occasionally. Add 1/2 cup water, sugar, ketchup, vinegar, and chipotle; bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer 6 minutes or until rhubarb is tender.

Step 2

Place half of rhubarb mixture in a blender. Remove center piece of blender lid (to allow steam to escape); secure blender lid on blender. Place a clean towel over opening in blender lid (to avoid splatters). Blend rhubarb mixture until smooth. Pour into a large bowl. Repeat procedure with remaining rhubarb mixture.

Step 3

Return rhubarb mixture to saucepan. Bring to a simmer; cook 1 minute or until hot. Stir in mustard and salt.