

Celery & Celeriac



Apium graveolens var. dulce

Celery needs a long, warm growing season, and mature plants will stand in mild winters. It is best to start your own seeds indoors or buy starts from the nursery. For greatest success provide a steady supply of nutrients, water and well-drained soil. The leaves, stems and seed can be enjoyed in a variety of dishes. Celeriac is a type of celery grown for its edible large root used to flavor soups.



SITE REQUIREMENTS

Celery requires full sun, at least six hours of direct sun, with some shade during heat spells. Plant in rich, well drained soil. Plan for 2-3 plants per person.

PLANTING

Start seeds indoors under lights 10-11 weeks before desired planting time. In Portland, start seeds indoors mid February through May. Prepare planting area by mixing in 3-4" of compost in the soil, and add granular all-purpose fertilizer to each planting hole. Plant transplants when night temperatures are above 55°F in May and early June (plants will bolt if exposed to night temperatures below 55 for a week). Space plants 12" apart in rows 18-24" apart. Cover new plantings with floating row cover to prevent carrot rust fly. To keep plants upright, work some soil up around them as they grow.

CULTURE

For whitened stalks, set bottomless milk carton, paper bag, or similar device over plants to exclude light from stalks (leaves must have sunlight). Or grow self-blanching varieties.

Mulch celery beds with 1-2" of compost to help retain moisture.

WATER REQUIREMENTS

How much water your plants will require depends on the soil and weather. Celery loves water and is accustomed to drawing large amounts of water from boggy areas, so do not let it dry out. If plants dry out they may yield tough, stringy, dry stalks. Celery prefers drip, flood irrigation, or very good hand watering.

FERTILIZING

Celery is a heavy feeder, so fertilize every 3-4 weeks with an all-purpose granular or liquid fertilizer. Celery needs to grow quickly or it turns tough and bitter

HARVESTING & STORAGE

Most varieties will survive in the winter garden until spring. Mature plants are fine without frost protection down to the high teens. For continual summer and fall harvest, pick individual stalks as needed. If preferred, the entire bunch can be harvested at one time 100-130 days after transplanting. Unopened flower buds and stems are also quite tasty. Celery stalks will turn limp soon after plucked from the garden. They can be refrigerated for up to a month or more, but are best left in the yard until ready to use. Wilted stalks can be refreshed by placing them in a tall glass of cold water.

Celeriac is harvested after light fall frost which improves it's flavor. If you remove lower and lateral leaf shoots while celeriac is growing, you will end up with a nice smooth crown. Dig up the crown, rinse well and allow to dry. It can be kept in a cool, dry, dark place for up to a couple of months.

PESTS & DISEASES

*Damping-off occurs in cool, wet weather and prevents seedlings from emerging or causes seedlings to die off. Replant new seeds in an area with better drainage, or add more compost and wait for warmer weather. *Aphids distort leaves, turn them yellow and leave a sticky coating on the plant. You may find large colonies of green or grey bugs or see the white aphid skeletons. The many remedies for aphids include insecticidal soap or horticultural oil sprayed every 7-10 days.

*Flea beetles chew dozens of tiny holes in the leaves. For prevention, cover new seed beds with floating row cover until plants are 8" tall. Dust with diatomaceous earth or spray with pyrethrin.

*Snails and slugs will chew the leaves or eat new transplants when they feed at night. They often leave iridescent trails on leaves and the ground. Slug baits and beer traps are just two ways to control them.

*Carrot rust fly maggots will burrow into the heart and stunt or kill the plant. Cover new plantings with floating row cover to prevent the maggots. You can also apply beneficial nematodes to help control the maggot population. Do not store infected roots in the garden over the winter.

*Early blight appears first as yellow spots on the outer leaves in late summer or early fall. These spots will then turn brown in wet weather and brown streaks appear in the stems. Spraying with Serenade or copper can help prevent the spread of the fungus. It is not related to blights of tomatoes and potatoes.

*Late blight first appears as yellow spots on the leaves turning to brown early in the season. If possible remove all infected parts and spray with serenade or copper to prevent the spread of the fungus. Be sure to remove all parts of the plant and roots when harvest is over.

*Bacterial leaf spot starts as water soaked spots which turn bright yellow and eventually turn brown. It is a fungus that overwinters on celery debris left in the garden. Clearing out debris and Serenade and copper can prevent the spread of this fungus.

Other pests and diseases include: blackheart (a calcium deficiency), fusarium yellows (stunted yellow plants), mosaic virus (mottled leaves), loopers and armyworms (holes in leaves and green excrement among stalks), and tarnished plant bug (turns central leaves dark).

VARIETIES

*Giant Red- A beautiful heirloom celery with reddish stalks. It holds its quality in the garden well. Matures 85-95 days.

*Utah 52-70R Improved-Long, crisp stalks have a sweet, nutty flavor. Disease resistant, high yields. Matures 100-120 days.

*Brilliant- From the Territorial seed catalog: This European strain is an excellent early-maturing variety. Selected from our trials for its uniform, nearly fiberless white 3-5 inch diameter roots and good productivity. Matures in 110 days.

Information compiled by Portland Nursery

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