

LONG ROOTS

by Peter Glazebrook

I have been growing long roots for many years now and have obtained world records for **carrot**, **parsnip** and **beetroot**. The body of the roots are of normal size: about 1m long but the attached root can be up to 5m or so long.

To most people the long roots are a disappointment because they expect it to be big as well as long. But of course to make them extra-long you need to encourage the root to grow and not its body. This is the clever part of my method of growing and I go to great lengths to achieve this. Just look at this rig: it's a work of art, (or a labour of love, depending on your viewpoint) in essence the carrot is grown in an elevated drainpipe and watering is controlled in such a way as to encourage the root to follow the water.



The seed is not terribly important (you need the long varieties) because it's the skill of the grower that counts, not the genetics of the seed like many other giant vegetables. Before



embarking on this method of growing long roots you will need a SE to SW facing wall in full sun that can support pipes up to 21ft long (if you are after a world record). In the early days I used to simply clip the pipes to the wall and scale the heights with a ladder. But now that I have formed this purpose built structure it makes life easier and safer. Also the small greenhouse built at the top makes for better control of the growing environment as wind can be a major problem.

The pipes do not need to be near vertical, an angle above 45° would be ok.

BASIC DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURE

*Plastic 70mm dia. pipe, 6m long. Each pipe is cut in half lengthways and then taped back together.

*Ladder up to 18ft long.

*Timber platform to stand on.

*Weather protection around top of pipes.

PIPE COMPOST MIXTURE

1/3rd clean garden soil. Fine sieved 1/4in

1/3rd peat ditto

1/6th grit sand 1/8th sieved

1/6th medium Perlite

Add fertilisers in form of superphosphate and sulphate of potash

Calcified seaweed and seaweed meal can also be added

Each year I try a different mix but there are so many variables that it is difficult to be definitive.

The year starts in March when the pipes are filled with the compost. This must be done when the pipes are in place. They are then watered, left to settle and then topped up as

required to within 1in of the top with more of the compost mixture and lightly watered again. To each pipe sow directly into the compost 3 seeds in the centre of the pipe, cover lightly, water and seal with a polythene bag to prevent seeds drying out.

Seeds are slow to germinate at this time of year so it will take between 14 to 21 days. As soon as they show, remove the covering polythene bags to let in the air. A week or so later thin out to the best two seedlings. One more week on, thin out to leave just one per tube.

GROWING ON THROUGH THE SUMMER

It's now all about watering, ventilating, feeding and nurturing.



Carrots, parsnips and beetroot in early July

Watering little and often is the secret here. Check on a weekly basis and only water enough to keep the soil moist. This is done with the aid of a small house plant watering can.

With regard to pests and diseases, I do not have carrot root fly problems but greenfly and caterpillars need to be prevented by a regular spray programme. Manage the ventilation on a daily basis.

REMOVAL

The final stage is to find out what is in the pipes. It pays not to water a few days before opening so as to dry out the compost in the pipes. Bring the pipes down carefully and place on a level surface with the bottom side of the pipe

uppermost. Remove the tape and open up. Take a few nerve pills and start the process of removing the carrot from the compost.



Pipe laid on low wall to make it easier to work on

The main root is normally visible between the compost and the pipe, allow to dry out slightly and then carefully tease away.

TRANSPORTATION

Now comes the problem of storage and transporting. All the hard work can be destroyed in a flash if you are not careful.

If kept damp, the long root can be coiled in a large box, using paper to separate the coils and moved to the show.

FINAL COMMENT

If you do not have a suitable wall, long vegetables can be grown in shorter tubes attached to the side of a fence and laid at an angle of about 45 degrees. They are grown in the same way, but if no top protection then delay sowing until April, depending on your location. A long growing season helps to obtain

a longer root. Our Giant Vegetable Show at the beginning of September is too early, but we have to grow for it.

It is fairly easy to grow roots up to say 3m, but progressively harder above this.

I could not grow these without the help of my wife Mary, so hopefully you can call on your family and friends.



Measuring table provided by the show, with the two NVS qualified judges



Problems. Compost had parted stopping or breaking carrot root.



Fine main root near tip, showing on bottom surface.

This article was written in 2012. Since then, Joe Atherton of the United Kingdom has broken all of Peter Glazebrook's records for long vegetables.

Beetroot (long)

721cm (284.0in) - Joe Atherton – 2015

Carrot (long)

584cm (230.0in) - Joe Atherton – 2007

Parsnip (long)

628cm (247.0in) - Joe Atherton – 2014