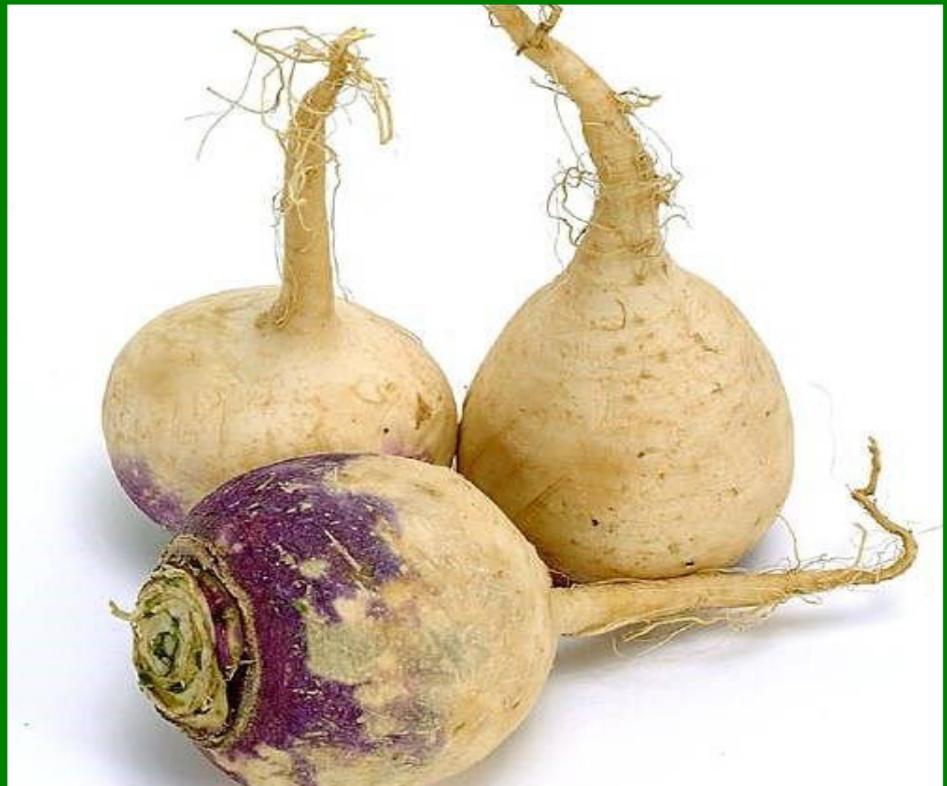


# ROOT CROP: RUTABAGA



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## Rutabaga: An Introduction

Rutabagas are neither turnips nor cabbages. It is actually a hybrid between cabbage and turnip. Rutabaga plants are grown for its leaves and roots. Rutabaga roots are used as a root vegetable while Rutabaga greens are used as a leafy vegetable. Rutabagas are one of the most important nutrient-dense foods available today. Rutabaga plants are a crop of temperate climates. It is believed to be originated in the Mediterranean region. Common names of rutabagas are Swedish turnip and yellow turnip.

### Taxonomy

Kingdom	Plantae
Order	Brassicales
Family	Brassicaceae
Genus	Brassica
Species	B. napus
Cultivar	nopobrassica

### Plant Description

Rutabaga is a herbaceous, biennial plant with a rosette of leaves above the ground and a prominent tap root below soil surface. Tap root stores food and transforms into the root vegetable called 'rutabaga tubers'. During the first season of growth cycle, the plant completes its vegetative growth and during the next season it begins its reproductive phase for seed production. For vegetable purposes, the plant is grown as an annual crop and roots are harvested as soon as they are ready.



## Popular Varieties of Rutabaga

There are three popular varieties of rutabagas:

1. **American Purple Top:** These varieties have large sized, finely textured, globe shaped tubers. Tubers are having purple tops with golden yellow flesh and are mildly flavoured. These tubers are delicious, firm and sweet when cooked. Plants of American Purple Top variety is easy to grow and tubers are excellent for winter storage. Seeds are normally sown in early spring or mid-summer.
2. **Helenor:** This variety is also known as 'swedes'. It produces average or small sized and globe-shaped tubers which are finely textured with rich turnip flavour. Tubers are having purple tops with golden flesh. It is a high yielding variety.
3. **Nadmorska:** This variety produces large sized tubers, with green tops and golden flesh; tubers are more pungent with a prominent mustardy flavour than purple topped varieties. It is an early maturing variety.

## Growing Rutabaga

**Climate and Soil:** Cool, moist temperate climate is preferred by rutabaga plants. Well-drained, fertile, sandy loam soils are the best soils. Plenty of sunlight is needed by the plants.

**Propagation:** Propagation is by seeds. Seeds may be directly sown in the fields. In case of direct sowing, seeds may be sown  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch deep in rows at 12-24 inches apart. In case of overcrowding of seedlings, thinning is practiced. Thinning is done at 4-6 inches apart. Seedlings may be raised in the well-prepared nursery beds also. 4-5 week old seedlings may be, then, transplanted. Crop will be ready for harvest in 90-100 days after sowing.

**Planting:** Since rutabagas are a cool weather crop, they may be planted either during spring or fall season when temperatures are low. In warmer climates, rutabagas may be grown throughout the winter season.

**Fertilizer Requirements:** At the time of land preparation, 20 to 25 tons of FYM (farmyard manure) or compost or any other organic manure may be incorporated into the top soil to increase soil fertility per hectare area. After that, as a standard, 70kg Nitrogen+50kg Phosphorous+50 kg Potassium per hectare is given for the plants. 35 kg nitrogen, 50 kg phosphorous and 50kg potassium is applied at the time of planting. Rest 35 kg of nitrogen is top-dressed at the root initiation stage.

**Irrigation:** It is important that soil should be kept moist always but avoids extreme conditions of drought and overwatering as both of these affect plants adversely. Overwatering may attract fungal diseases and drought-like conditions may decrease crop productivity. As a rule, need-based irrigation is done always. First irrigation is done soon after planting. Subsequent irrigations are done after every application of fertilisers and manures. During initial growth stages of the plant, frequent irrigations are necessary. Mulching can be done to conserve soil moisture; this will prevent weed growth also.

**Harvesting and Yield:** Root tubers will be ready to be dug out 90-100 days after sowing/planting. Growing season depends on the cultivar and growing environmental conditions. Yield varies from 30-40 tons/ha. Freshly harvested tubers can be stored in a refrigerator for up to 6 months.

### **Insect Pest and Disease Management**

Most serious pests are aphids, red and black harlequin bugs, root maggots and beetles; most serious diseases are club root and black rot. Integrated pest management (IPM) and integrated disease management (IDM) practices, comprising of cultural, mechanical, biological, and chemical control measures, may be adopted for effective management of pests and diseases.

### **Seed Production**

Rutabagas must overwinter for seed production purposes. In warmer climates, tubers are left un-harvested and plants are allowed to complete its reproductive cycle. A layer of mulch will be sufficient to protect the plants from winter. In colder climates, rutabaga tubers are dug out and tops are trimmed to one inch; tubers are then stored in damp sand at 33-40 degrees F until replanting in spring. During spring, these tubers are transplanted in the field and the plant completes its reproductive cycle by producing flowering stalks and later, seed pods containing numerous seeds. The seed pods are then harvested when they begin to turn brown and dried well in a cool, protected place. Dried seed pods are then threshed out to extract seeds. Seeds can be stored in a cool, dry place for up to 4 years. Average yield of seed per hectare will vary from variety to variety and may be about 500-550 kg.

### **Food Uses**

Oven roasted rutabagas are a delicious dish; rutabaga tubers are often roasted with herbs and spices. Thin slices of rutabaga tubers can be baked like French fries. Boiled rutabagas are mashed with butter or cream and used as a side dish. Rutabagas can be sliced and chopped and used in fresh salads. Mixed vegetables can prepared along with potatoes and carrots. Rutabagas are good flavor enhancers in soups; Soups can be prepared by adding ginger, carrots and other ingredients. Puree can be prepared from rutabaga tubers and this puree can be used as an ingredient in other vegetable preparations. Rutabagas can be pickled also. Fritters and pies are also prepared from rutabagas.

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