

Summary:

Direct seeded fall root crops are some of the least labor intensive crops to grow on our farm. Often fall root crops don't require any cultivation or hand weeding. Later planting dates allow for all nutrient needs to be met via cover cropping. Late planting dates can also lower pest pressure, particularly if the crops are planted far away from summer crops of the same family. As we trend towards wetter or more consistent moisture in the fall, current weather patterns allow for little or no need for irrigation. Much of our fall root crop production is simply planting the crop and then harvesting it!

Fall root crops are also more efficient to harvest relative to other veg crops, because root crops can be mass harvested and stored. Mass harvest allows for more efficient material handling, with the use of larger harvest containers and a more efficient organization of labor. The Use of a barrel washer and or brusher washer makes processing roots relatively quick.

Planting root crops

Field prep: Field cultivate (stale seed bed, summer fallow) successive times over fall root ground. Allow legume cover crop grow large before plow down helps with nutrient needs. Use of a precision seeder allows for no thinning. Even in beets!

Latest Planting Dates:

Parsnips: May-Early June (hardest root crop to grow)

Carrots: last planting date mid-late July

Beets: end of July

Brassicas:

Rutabagas: end of July

Watermelon Radish: early-mid August

Daikon, China Rose Radish, Korean Radish: mid August

Hakurei Turnips: mid august to early September.

Storage: winter storage of roots is often just an insulated room with a thermostat and a heat lamp. Broken reefer trailers can often be purchased at low costs and make a cheap storage unit. Coolbots are needed for warmer days and for fall storage, but your BTU requirements will be much lower than for summer cooling.

Marketing tips.

Marketing fall and winter root crops is probably the biggest challenge in growing fall and winter roots, as many of these vegetables other than carrots, potatoes and onions are not very popular.

Wholesale: pack roots in 25# bags. Usually sell for \$1.00 / lb except parsnips, chiogga and golden beets @ \$1.25 /lb. Most wholesale customers will run out of supply from other farmers of beets and carrots and brassica roots by mid-Feb.

Root Veg medley: mix unusual root crops together to help sell them as a package. Try to make the mix colorful. Add more familiar crops in the mix to make the product less daunting. People who want local produce are more experimental in the winter when more popular vegetables are not available locally. Help them out with cooking tips, samples.

Use winter greens to help sell root crops which are in less demand particularly via winter CSA. Greens can also help draw your customers in @ winter farmers' markets.