



## Growing Long Carrots My Way

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It's easy isn't it growing long carrots for exhibition!! After writing an article on stumps for the old bulletin, and having won the long carrots at the Scottish Championships in 2008, 2009 and this year 2010 (plus a couple of other wins previously) my main aim was the Nationals at Dundee – easy!! More on this later but almost when I was starting to look for the carrots for Dundee David Allison asked me to do this article. Well my thoughts at this point were unprintable as I had looked at around 10 carrots to see the tap root (I can do this by removing the sand between barrels) and every one looked like an octopus with roots all over the place. On pulling them the first couple of feet were perfect and then the roots were all over the place. So at this point one day before the Nationals I pulled the doors of the frame shut and thought “dash it” there's no way I am going through the lot to find 5 (or swear words to that effect!) and they must be mad if they think I should be writing about growing long carrots! However things did improve later on in September when I won the Scottish – and here I am writing about long carrots.

So where do you start? Well probably the biggest issue is as Shakespeare said “to cover or not to cover that is the question”. I have grown good long carrots completely outside with only wind protection, and I have grown good stump carrots completely inside a tunnel (never tried long carrots). But what is best? Both have their merits so this year I built a frame 26ft x 14ft covered with a mixture of Enviromesh and polythene to try and get the best of both worlds. Why? Well one of the reasons was after doing some research (or surfing the web as the younger members know it) a lot of science was saying as the temperature increases the root length decreases and that the highest carotenoids which give colour are obtained at temperatures above 16c and below 21c. So my theory was to try and keep an even temperature near those.



Within the frame there are 36 barrels raised on breeze block beds which give me a total depth of sand around 6ft. One of the problems I have always had, and one which I am sure everybody has is how to get the tap root fully out when lifting. My barrels are balanced on 3x2 timber which then allows me to lift out the sand all the way down the tap root that is in the breeze block bed and then wash it out to get the maximum length. The sand is concreting sand which is only partially washed (as I can get it straight from the sand quarry). I am also in the process of altering a 30x14 tunnel (making it around 8ft high at the sides) to give me another 30 carrots grown in damproof sleeves made into cones (maybe another article??) and also another 24 in 5ft 6” pipes which are around 8inch diameter. So for 2011 hopefully I will have all bases covered.

The seed I use is my own saved stuff which originates from Graeme Watson, plus I still sow some barrels with Graeme's own seed. The sowing date for me where I live has always been the second week in April, however with growing some next year in the tunnel I will probably sow these some 2-3 weeks earlier.

Now on to the subject straight from Macbeth's witches scene of hubble bubble toil and trouble- what mix to use. Well since I started back growing long carrots in 2007 I have used the same mixture – 1 75 litre bag of Levington F1, 1 25 litre bag of silver sand, 12 ounces of Vitax Q4 and 12 ounces of calcified seaweed (both ground finely in a coffee grinder). This year I also added some Nutri-mate but in honesty I didn't see any real difference. The Levington F1 is also put through a 6mm riddle as you will be amazed by the amount of rough stuff even in F1. This is all mixed together in a cement, sorry long root mixer (it never has nor will see cement!!). The main motto here is to use the mix that works for you – there are lots going around, however the one thing I would never do is put any type of soil near carrots. Due to the pressures of work I always mixed it close to the sowing date and used it almost immediately- now that I have retired after 34 years in the Fire service will I mix it earlier – no way. Although I like to tinker and experiment there is no way I am changing things for the sake of it if it works.

I have 4 stations per barrel which are bored out by using a 6ft steel pinch bar around 5" diameter. Yes I know there are schools of thought that you core then bore, but my theory is that by only boring you are in effect slightly compacting the bore hole forcing the young carrot to be squeezed downwards before it is large enough to start pushing against the borehole. I would like to say that I stick to 3-4 seeds per borehole in a dimple the depth of my finger nail (scientific or what!) but I am not that organised and always seem to drop extra in – which has never seemed to cause any problems. The barrels are then covered with polycarbonate sheets and kept moist until germination has occurred.

I thin my carrots down to 1 when they are around 3" or so (around Mid May) and they look strong enough to take it. I always pull out the seedlings I don't want – again some people use scissors but I would rather have any decomposing material removed.

So to growing on. I have always said to people that ask how I get good carrots that once you have prepared the way you want to grow them, got your mix right, and then bored/cored the holes, then sowed the seed, that there is not a lot you can do to really affect them if you left them alone. The main areas from germination until lifting are watering, feeding, and pest control. So what do I do? Well after they are germinated and thinned I use the big man upstairs – unless he has a water shortage and has his heating on in May/June (doesn't happen a lot in Scotland but this year we had temperatures of around 80 degrees for a while at the end of May just after having frost). Going back to the problems I had this year with the wrong carrots I am sure that this was the cause. With regards feeding – I don't- what is in the mix is sufficient for me although I did use some Bio Magic given to me by a good friend a couple of times this year – The only difference seemed to be heavier foliage.

The main concern for me is pest control. As with everybody the two main pests I have are Carrot Fly and Willow Aphid. Touch wood I am lucky in that I don't seem to have a lot of carrot fly where I grow but I don't take any chances, spraying the carrots every 10 days with Hallmark which seems to do the trick with both these pests. The one problem I had this year was a couple of barrels which had

whitefly – which is a real pain to get rid of – however managed to do so with some magic unnamed stuff!

When it comes to lifting I like to lift as close to the show as is possible. I look at the foliage and then gently scrape away the sand from the carrot shoulder. I am looking for the size of carrot that I know will give me a carrot with full length all the way down. It's hard to describe what it looks like – you just know. To me when you start to get really big carrots at the shoulder you are losing the condition, plus the size is not in proportion to the length. Once I have identified the carrot I want I then dig away the sand underneath the supported barrel with my hand and wash the tap root until I can see it to follow it all the way down to the bottom. Once the tap root is released you will get every bit of it out by gently pulling on the carrot(dry). Believe me I have tried everything over the years from water to a mud lance used by the Fire Brigade, but this method is the simplest for me. Once the carrots are pulled they are rinsed in a barrel of water then gently washed with washing up liquid. They are then wrapped up and put in a box the length of the carrot for transportation to the show.



Once I am at the show I then spend a lot more time cleaning the stalks and then taking every fine root hair off. They are then placed on a black cloth triangle and covered, and kept damp, with a cloth. – nothing riles me more than seeing exhibitors just dumping stuff on a bench. I can remember the guys who were my mentors (especially one of Scotland's best Jasper Burt, saying – “There might be better growers but everybody should be able to stage their exhibit the same by spending some time on it”. To me never a truer word said!!

So the results are announced – did you win? – It's good to win but really whether I win or not I am looking to improve in the following year. Success doesn't come along without real hard work, dedication, and effort – something that everybody has the ability to put in to growing. Keep winning and you become like a pheasant in October – hunted! My aim for 2011 is to win the Scottish for the 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row – Hunted, however also the Nationals in Wales – The Hunter!! However it's not easy – I was going for 4 in a row with stumps at the Scottish. Did I win – No. Was I in the cards- No!!(however I did manage 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Nationals)

So is it easy – probably not, but to all those aspiring carrot growers I would say this: At one point I couldn't grow carrots, Graeme Watson couldn't, Dave Thornton couldn't (a certain Mr Smith says he still can't!). The only way we managed to was to speak to people and find out how it is done, have a commitment to hard work, and a determination to succeed. If you have these – well then it is easy!!!



Good Growing,

Ian.