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## CELERIAC (*Apium graveolens var. rapaceum*)

Also known as root, knob, or turnip-rooted celery, celeriac is closely related to celery. Growing methods are similar to that of celery, but celeriac is known for being somewhat easier to grow. The stalks of celeriac are not the same as celery stalks and only the root should be eaten. With its fresh celery-like flavor celeriac can be used in soups, stews, and purées. The crisp texture also lends itself to be eaten raw in salads. Another added benefit is that, unlike celery, celeriac can be stored for several months.

**SITE SELECTION:** Celeriac prefers a location in full sun to part shade with a fertile well-drained soil. Organic matter added to the soil can help with water retention to prevent the plants from drying out during growth. A pH range of 6.0–7.0 is best for optimum plant growth.

In order to reach optimum size celeriac needs steady, consistent moisture in fertile soil. Keep the planting weed-free through careful cultivation or use of mulch. As the root develops you may hill soil over roots for thorough blanching.

**CULTURE:** Sow seeds 10–12 weeks prior to the last frost date in your location. Sow 6 seeds per inch or 2 seeds per cell if using plug trays. Cover the seeds with  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch of screened soilless media or vermiculite, as the seeds require light for germination. Germination may take up to 3 weeks. Keep soil moist and warm, 70–75°F/21–24°C, until the seedlings emerge. After seedlings emerge, reduce temperature to 60–70°F/16–21°C. Once the seedlings have 2 sets of true leaves, transplant to 1½-inch plug trays or thin to 1 plant per cell if originally sown in plug trays.

**PESTS:** Celeriac is a fairly pest-free crop. Row covers or timely insecticide applications should control aphids. Johnny's preferred control method is the application of Safer® Insect Soap.

Set out seedlings once the weather has fully settled in late May to mid-June. Harden off seedlings prior to transplanting by reducing water and exposing to outdoor conditions carefully. **Seedlings should not be exposed to temperatures below 55°F/12.7°C for a period of 10 days or more; this will induce the plants to start flowering (bolting).** Plants should be set 6–8 inches apart in the row with 18–36 inches between rows. Irrigate to keep soil moist for uninterrupted growth.

**DISEASES:** Blackheart and Celery Mosaic Virus are the most common diseases associated with celeriac. Supplying the soil with adequate calcium and consistent moisture will prevent blackheart, which can be identified by black, necrotic tissue at the plant's crown. The incidence of Celery Mosaic Virus — identified by yellowed, mottled, and malformed leaves — can be reduced by controlling the aphids that transmit this disease. Proper crop rotation practices should keep any leaf blights in check.

**HARVEST:** Celeriac can be harvested any time after the bulbous root reaches a diameter of 3–5 inches. Celeriac's flavor improves after the first light frost but it should be harvested before the first hard freeze. Cut tops  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch above the bulb and trim the roots from the bottom. Store roots in a cold 33–38°F/0.55–3.3°C environment at 95–98% relative humidity. With proper storage conditions, the roots will be of good quality for 6–8 months.

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