



Radishes

Homegrown radishes are delightfully crunchy and retain a mild flavor as long as you keep them consistently moist and pull them young. Radish greens have a Velcro-like texture when raw but are chock-full of vitamins and delicious cooked. As summer heats up, I let my radishes go to seed and harvest the succulent, spicy pods that develop after the plant sends up its pretty, edible flowers.

Planting

Radish seeds germinate quickly, usually in under a week. Sow them thickly, ½ inch deep and 1 inch apart; this way you can thin out and eat loads of the spicy little sprouts. Broadcast the seeds over a bed, or sow them in rows 8 to 10 inches apart under slower-growing vegetables or anywhere you find a bare, sunny spot in the garden. Garden or salad radishes—the familiar round roots—mature in just under a month. Begin sowing them as soon as the soil reaches 45 degrees F. Dig alfalfa meal into the soil before sowing (follow the label's recommended application rate). Sow a small quantity each week, but take a break once temperatures hit the high 60s, as the plants bolt quickly in the heat and the roots become spicy and develop a pithy texture when grown in soil above 75 degrees. Begin sowing again in late summer for fall harvests. Winter radishes, including black and daikon types, mature in 50 to 70 days and develop a sweet, mild flavor in cold weather. Sow them in the same manner

as salad radishes, but wait to do so until two and a half months before the average first fall frost. Make three successive sowings a week apart.

Growing

Thin radish seedlings to 2 inches apart in all directions as soon as their first true leaves begin to emerge. Harvest baby radishes a couple of weeks later by thinning out every other plant; thin winter radishes to 6 to 8 inches apart. Allow the remaining roots to mature. Foliar-feed two weeks after germination with diluted liquid organic fertilizer. Drought stress causes radishes to become hot and their texture to turn from crisp to spongy. The roots also fail to plump up if the soil dries out. Stay on top of irrigation, watering whenever soil dries down to the base of your first knuckle. Mound soil over the exposed shoulders of radishes to prevent slugs from feeding on them, and don't mulch, as it provides a place for the slimy creatures to hide out. Extend the harvest season of winter radishes by mulching around them with 6 inches of straw after the first frost.

Harvesting

Radish roots pop up out of the soil slightly when they mature, but you can pull them anytime. I tend to sow them thickly and then gradually thin the plants out, first eating the sprouts and then the roots at several different sizes. Just be sure to pull salad radishes before they grow larger

than 1 inch in diameter and winter radishes at 2 inches: any larger and they tend to crack, taste hot, and develop a pithy texture. To harvest, simply grasp the leaves near the soil line, give the roots a jiggle, and pull them straight out (you may need to loosen the soil with a garden fork before harvesting winter radishes). Radishes produce delicate white flowers blushed with pink; snip off the slightly spicy blossoms as they open. Pinch the pods off the plant just after they form, as the longer you wait, the tougher they become. Pull winter radishes as needed; just be sure to harvest all the roots before the ground freezes solid.

Storing

Twist off the greens, leaving a ½-inch nub; store them separately in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 3 days, as you would arugula (see page 97). Refrigerate salad radishes and radish pods in a perforated bag for up to 10 days; refrigerate winter radishes for 1 month or longer. Use the flowers immediately. Wash the greens, roots, and pods just before eating.

Cooking Ideas

Add salad and winter radish thinnings to salads, cheese sandwiches, or miso soup. Substitute the greens for spinach or mustard greens in cooked recipes. Toss salad or winter radishes in olive oil and sea salt and roast at 375 degrees F until tender. Layer thinly sliced radishes on a piece of generously buttered baguette. Grate winter radishes into cabbage slaw or add them to pickled

kimchi recipes. Sprinkle the flowers over salads, hot soup, or baked fish. Stir-fry the pods in a hot wok with tarragon and serve as an appetizer. Pickle radish pods or winter radishes in your favorite brine.

Delicious Varieties

'Easter Egg II'. 30 days. From one seed packet you get to harvest red, magenta, purple, violet, and white globelike radishes. I also adore 'French Breakfast', a variety with blunt red cylindrical roots and white tips. Open-pollinated.

'Miyashige'. 50 days. A daikon with long white roots flushed with pale green near the top. The roots sweeten when exposed to light frosts. Produces abundant greens. Open-pollinated.

'Rat Tail'. 45 days. This variety was bred specifically to produce crisp pods that grow up to a foot long and have an exceptional pungent, spicy flavor. Harvest the pods at a pencil-sized diameter or smaller. Open-pollinated.

RDISHES

Raphanus sativus

PLANT FAMILY: Brassicaceae

EDIBLE PARTS: Roots, leaves, flowers, pods

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Cabbage maggots, flea beetles, downy mildew



Tartines with Gruyère and Radish Greens

SERVES 4

2 cups grated Gruyère
(about ½ pound)

3 tablespoons unsalted
butter, softened

½ teaspoon Dijon mustard

¼ cup finely chopped
radishes

1 tablespoon finely
chopped flat-leaf parsley

1 tablespoon finely
snipped chives

¼ teaspoon freshly
ground pepper

Four ½-inch-thick slices
of good bread

2 teaspoons olive oil

4 cups packed radish
greens or mixed greens,
washed and roughly
chopped

Tartines—open-faced sandwiches—provide the perfect platform for enjoying slightly wilted greens. This recipe calls for radish greens, but you can substitute spinach, arugula, or turnip, mustard, or beet greens. If you're short on time, simply toast a slice of bread, slather it with pesto or olive tapenade, and top it with a slice of cheese instead of making the cheesy toasts.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F and place an oven rack in the top position.

In a medium bowl, use a fork to mix the Gruyère and butter. Stir in the mustard, radishes, parsley, chives, and pepper. Divide the mixture evenly among bread slices, pressing it down slightly. Place the bread on a baking sheet and toast until the cheese puffs up and is lightly browned, 12 to 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the radish greens, with some water still clinging to their leaves, to the skillet. Cook, stirring frequently, until just barely wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Spread the wilted greens evenly over cheesy toasts and serve immediately.