



**LEFT** Celeriac takes about six months to mature and can be left in the ground and harvested from October through to March, as and when required.

**BOTTOM LEFT** Versatile winter root vegetables, celeriac, parsnip and Jerusalem artichokes can be used in almost any combination and quantity. Vary according to your personal preferences and cropping.

**RIGHT** Jacky pulls up some celeriac for the Daylesford Organic kitchens. The majority of the root lies above ground.



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# Roots

Plucked fresh from their underground lairs or stored throughout winter, root vegetables' robust, earthy flavours are perfectly suited to warming dishes

**PHOTOGRAPHS** MICHELLE GARRETT | **WORDS** JACKY HOBBS

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**T**hese vegetables may be ugly on the outside, but they have an undeniable inner beauty in their distinctive flavours, nutty and sometimes sweet, which bring nutritious warmth and comfort to the winter kitchen. Root vegetables are all hardy too, have a prolonged harvest/storage period, and can even be left, either in the ground, or in a clamp (*see pg 66*), and harvested as required. Celeriac, Jerusalem artichokes and, to a lesser degree, parsnips, are irritatingly knobbly and therefore their preparation can be slightly labour intensive, but it is worth the effort as they reward with their distinctive flavours and versatile culinary reincarnations.

Celeriac and parsnip are both grown from seed. Celeriac ideally needs to be started off early indoors, in March or April, and is notoriously tricky to germinate successfully, so use a propagator if you have one, set at 15-18°C to get them going. Otherwise sow in pots under glass and keep at 10-15°C. Grow seedlings on in a frost-free greenhouse or cold frame, and transfer to individual pots when large enough to be handled. Harden off the plants before transplanting out towards the end of May, beginning of June.

Celeriac is a moisture-loving vegetable, requiring a rich, fertile, water-retentive soil and a sunny site. Plant out 30cm apart with 40-45cm between rows, with the stem base at ground level. ►

Aromatic celeriac, parsnip and Jerusalem artichoke work well together in dishes: their cooking time is synchronised and their flavours combine well. Blended together, they create a unique and warming winter flavour, which is nutty and slightly sweet. Boil them and then mash together with a knob of butter, or roast like a vegetable pot pourri. Here are some other delicious recipe ideas to try:

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## Recipe 1

### Aromatic winter root soup

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Serves 6

#### Ingredients

- 200g celeriac, peeled and cubed
- 100g parsnips, peeled and sliced
- 100g Jerusalem artichoke, peeled and cubed
- 1 large onion, peeled and sliced
- Salt and pepper
- 1 litre chicken or vegetable stock
- 100ml single cream
- Vegetable crisps (see pg 67) or sunflower seeds for decoration

#### Method

- **If you have an Aga** simply place all of the ingredients in a covered casserole, start off in the top oven until the stock begins to bubble - about 10 mins - then drop to the lower oven for two to three hours until the vegetables are soft and pulpy.
- **Otherwise bring all ingredients** together in a pan, bring to the boil and simmer gently until vegetables are soft and pulpy.
- **Whizz to a rough purée** with a blender or food processor and adjust seasoning as required.
- **Add the single cream** and gently re-heat before serving. Top with vegetable crisps or sunflower seeds.



## Expert Advice

### TIPS ON GROWING JERUSALEM ARTICHOKEs BY JEZ TAYLOR, MARKET GARDEN MANAGER AT DAYLESFORD ORGANIC

● **Jerusalem artichokes** produce tall, yellow, sunflower-like blooms in summer. Meanwhile, below ground are reddish, knobbly, potato-like tubers, which mature in winter and are truly delicious.

● **They have a tendency** to run amok in the garden, and once established are tricky to get rid of, so plant just a few; a single plant can produce about 3kg of produce.

● **Choose a semi-permanent site** and set with stout stakes as their tall stems will need supporting, especially in less-sheltered sites.

● **Prepare the earth**, digging in well-rotted manure before planting.

● **Select healthy tubers** from last year's crop and plant in early spring, 10-15cm deep, 50cm to 100cm apart - adequate space for each crown to develop multiple tubers.

● **Top** with well-rotted manure.

● **Protect young shoots** from slugs and snails with a cloche.

● **When 30cm tall**, earth up the tubers as you would potatoes and only water in prolonged dry spells.

● **In autumn**, when foliage starts to change colour, cut back to 30cm.

● **Unearth as required**, November through to March. They are best left in the ground to self-store as they tend to shrivel if dehydrated.



**ABOVE** Jez Taylor of Daylesford Organic lifts mature celeriac ready for the kitchen and shop.

**RIGHT** Jez cuts away foliage from the celeriac as he harvests, cleaning up the root as he goes so only the edible elements are carried back to the kitchen.

**BOTTOM LEFT** Each crown of Jerusalem artichoke produces about 20 individual tubers, which will be bigger if you adhere to the given planting distances (see left). Jez favours variety 'Red Fuseau' as it is less knobbly than most, making it easier to prepare.



Add mulch to help retain moisture and keep free from weeds. As celeriac matures, remove the outer, horizontal leaves and any side shoots that appear, which focuses attention on the development of the crown. Celeriac takes more than six months to mature, and can be harvested from October onwards, when it will be about the size of a tennis ball, but can be left in the ground and lifted as required, until about March. Some people prefer to lift the vegetables before Christmas and store them in a cool, dark shed.

Celeriac is relatively disease free. Slugs at the seedling stage are probably the biggest issue to deal with. If your plants are prone to bolting, buy resistant seed varieties such as 'Alabaster' and 'Prinz Celeriac'. 'Monarch' is a popular, smoother-skinned variety with succulent, firm flesh.

Parsnips are easier to cultivate, although they too have a very long growing season. Soil should be well prepared, rich, heavy and well drained in a sunny site. Sow seeds in situ from March through to May, placing three seeds at 15cm intervals, 1.5cm deep and 30cm apart, and cover with a cloche or other protective cover until seedlings appear. Thin the seedlings when they are 2.5cm tall, leaving one every 25cm, and keep weed-free until ready to harvest in autumn, when foliage begins to die back. Produce can be lifted as required. Self-storage is a good option for parsnips, although some believe that frosted roots are even more flavoursome.

The major problems with parsnips are carrot fly, which can be combated by growing under mesh, and canker, a brownish-orange rot often caused by drought, over-rich soil or crown damage. If you are unsuccessful in tweaking the growing conditions and symptoms persist, sow canker-resistant cultivars such as 'Avonresister', 'Archer', and 'Albion' (a good yielder and very flavoursome). 'Gladiator' produces a high yield in heavier soils, while 'White Gem', 'Palace F1', and 'Tender and True' have very good flavour.



*Self-storage is a good option for parsnips, although some believe that frosted roots are even more flavoursome*

#### STORING ROOTS IN A CLAMP

**If you have large quantities of roots to store, consider making a traditional clamp:**

- **Choose a sheltered, well-drained site** and dig a trench around it to help drainage.
- **Put down a thin layer of light, sandy soil** or sand and cover with a layer of straw.
- **Remove the top growth from roots** to avoid rotting and layer them in a pyramid shape. Cover this with about 20cm of straw, followed by another layer of soil to keep out the frosts. Leave a tuft of straw coming out of the soil to allow excess heat and moisture to escape.
- **Keep vigilant** - rodents will be attracted to this tasty store.



## Recipe 2 Trio of vegetable crisps

Try this recipe with a combination such as parsnip, potato, celeriac and beetroot, in any quantity, to make a tasty nutritious snack or soup topper.

Serves 6

### Ingredients

- Root vegetables peeled and very thinly sliced
- 25ml extra virgin olive oil (or to coat)
- Salt to taste

### Method

- **Pre-heat the oven** to 200°C.
- **Pat dry the thinly sliced** root vegetables with kitchen paper.
- **In a bowl**, drizzle the thin slices with olive oil and mix well to ensure evenly coated.
- **Place individually in rows** on a lined baking sheet, season to taste and place in the hot oven until golden, 5-10 mins depending how thinly sliced.
- **Remove any** that brown prematurely.
- **Place on kitchen paper** or wire rack to cool.
- **Serve in greaseproof paper cones**, in a bowl or serve as a soup or sandwich topper. Delicious warm!

## Recipe 3 Veggie cakes

You can use any combination of root vegetables, but I usually apportion by size, i.e. one celeriac, three to four parsnips and five to six Jerusalem artichokes. Leftovers are great re-heated, especially for breakfast.

Serves 6

### Ingredients

- Root vegetable combo as referenced above
- 60g of butter (knob for mash, rest for frying)
- 60g plain flour (50g for patties, 10g for dusting)
- Either: freshly chopped parsley, 50g grated cheddar cheese, or 50g fried pancetta

### Method

- **Peel and chop** all root vegetables, drop into a pan of salted water and bring to the boil as you would for mashed potatoes.
- **When roots are tender**, in about 12-15 mins, strain and roughly mash with a good knob of butter, 1 beaten egg, 50g plain flour and parsley, cheese or pancetta. Season to taste.
- **Mould the mash** into individual square patties and dust with flour. Melt butter in frying pan and sizzle patties gently until golden, turning once.
- **Serve as an accompaniment** or with bacon and eggs for a winter breakfast. ♦

