Root Vegetable Varieties for the Moapa and Virgin Valleys

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**Introduction**

Vegetable Gardening in the Moapa and Virgin Valleys (University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Special Publication 09-01) authored by Sylvan Wittwer is requested on a regular basis and is considered the essential vegetable-growing manual for the area. Excerpts from that publication and input from other longtime local growers have been used as the basis for this publication. The purpose of this publication is to emphasize the selected vegetable varieties or cultivars (seeds/plants) that may perform better than others in the Moapa and Virgin Valleys.

The climate here is comparable to that of Egypt along the Nile River Valley. In both areas there are three major growing seasons: fall, winter and spring. Rainfall averages about 4 inches per year. Precipitation is both unpredictable and localized. Average daytime temperatures during July and August usually peak above 100 F, with readings often 110 F to 120 F during early afternoon, and 65 F to 95 F at nighttime. The differences between day and night temperatures at ground level may be as much as 50 F. The soil is alkaline with a high salt content.

Use the climatic conditions to your best advantage. Take advantage of the climatic resources of the Moapa and Virgin Valleys by the use of site selection. Extend the spring season by using transplants, row and plant covers, and wise selection of varieties. Take advantage of the sun with row orientation and provide protection by using shade covers. Take advantage of fall and winter production for cool-season crops to avoid weeds, reduce water requirements, improve produce quality and enjoy working in cooler temperatures.

Seed companies may not stock varieties of some vegetables well adapted for the valleys. Gardeners are encouraged to trade with their neighbors who have successfully grown an outstanding variety. The local Cooperative Extension office can provide information on how to save and collect seeds from older open-pollinated cultivars. While only selected vegetables that have proven particularly successful are included in this publication, readers are encouraged to experiment with other cultivated vegetable varieties that may be of interest.
Beets: Wittwer’s favorite was Detroit Dark Red.

- Chiogga – These red-and-white-striped roots are sweeter than other beets and so beautiful, they might win over any beet doubters.
- Detroit Dark Red – This heirloom from 1892 has nearly round blood-red, 3 inch diameter roots. It is great for canning and fresh eating as well as prolific, and a good keeper. 60 to 65 days.
- Detroit Supreme – This variety produces from late fall or early winter plantings, globe-shaped beets with roots up to one-half pound in size by mid-April. There should be no “zoning” (circular patterning) in the roots. They are not woody and can be used raw or for dicing, canning/bottling or pickling.
- Early Wonder – An early, smooth, round beet that makes lots of tall tender greens. This heirloom is perfect pickled, fresh, cooked or in borscht. 50 days.
- Golden – These sweet, round, heirloom roots are increasingly popular in specialty markets. Green leaves with attractive yellow stems are prized in salad mix when small, and have a mild flavor when cooked.
- Merlin – These roots are smooth, uniform and round with high sugar content. The tops are somewhat smaller than those of the Red Ace and are good for bunching. Some are resistant to cercospora leaf spot and downy mildew.
- Red Ace, Warrior and Red Cloud – These are new super beet hybrid varieties especially suited for greens, baby beets, dicing and storage.
**Carrots:** Newer improved hybrid carrot varieties are sweet and crisp, and have higher nutritional values, especially in vitamin A. Wittwer preferred Hybrid Sweetness and Pot of Gold.

- Hybrid Sweetness and Pot of Gold – Both are supreme in quality, sweetness and color and have high carotene content. Pot of Gold is an Imperator type with 50 percent more carotene.
- Chantenay – This variety has short and tapered roots that are about 6 1/2 inches long and 2 1/2 inches wide at the shoulder at maturity.
- Danvers, or Danvers Half Long – Developed in Danvers, Mass. in the late 1800s, these carrots are 2 inches wide at the shoulder, tapering to a blunt end and uniform roots up to 8 inches long. They produce high yields in clay or heavy soils. 65 to 87 days.
- Hybrid Kuroda – This is an improved Danvers type with some heat resistance.
- SugarSnax – The rich, dark-orange color reveals the extra high beta-carotene content in this carrot. Slender roots grow 9 inches long with strong tops.

**Garlic:** Garlic is exceptionally winter hardy. Fall is the time to plant for best yields and highest quality bulbs. First decide whether to grow hardneck garlic or softneck garlic. Garlic takes up little room and will not cross-pollinate, so pick a few varieties to try.

- Early California White – This is great garlic for the beginning grower, as it has a semi-rich flavor, without the hot bite of some garlic. The large cloves are sure to please. It harvests mid-late season.
- Late California White – This is the most common garlic seed on the market, and like the California Early White, is great garlic for beginners. It has a stronger flavor than Early White, is quite heat tolerant and is one of the best keepers, storing for as long as 8 months! It harvests late season.
- Inchelium Red – This garlic grows very well in the Moapa and Virgin Valleys. It usually has anywhere from 12 to 20 cloves and is large enough that even the interior cloves are generally of good size. Bulbs are usually over 2 1/2 inches in diameter and will weigh several ounces each. It harvests mid-season.
Jicama: This vine can grow up to 20 feet long. In the Moapa and Virgin Valleys it can be planted outdoors in the early spring; it can also be started indoors for a big head start. It needs 8 to 9 months to produce the sweet, juicy, crunchy roots that are the edible part. It also needs sun and rich moist soil. Caution: the seeds and pods of jicama are poisonous!

Onions: Onions can be grown from sets, plants or seeds. Onion sets are cold hardy, disease resistant, and emerge in almost any type of growing environment.

Note: Nevada is in the “Intermediate-Day” zone – the further north in the country, the more hours of daylight there are in the summer. Countless discouraged local gardeners have planted the dry sets sold in nurseries and big box stores. These generic sets (“White,” “Red,” etc.) inevitably bolt, rather than bulb, leading people to assume that onions just don’t grow here, unaware that onions are sensitive to day length. Experienced local growers advise the purchase of Intermediate-Day onion transplants, planted Feb. 1-15.

- Candy – This is a yellow, globe-shaped, sweet hybrid. Size potential: Up to 6 inches. Storage potential: Approximately three months. Days to harvest: 90.
- Red Candy Apple – This is a deep-red, flattened globe-shaped, sweet hybrid. Size potential: 3 inches. Storage potential: Approximately two months. Days to harvest: 95.
- Super Star – This is a white, globe shaped, sweet hybrid. Size potential: 4 inches. Storage potential: two months. Days to harvest: 95.
- Texas Granex Hybrid – This onion is grown and marketed as “Vidalia’s,” has an attractive yellow color, is short-day in photoperiod, and is deliciously mild and sweet. It produces a large, globe-shaped bulb and is disease resistant with good storage quality. This variety grows well locally in the fall/winter season.

Potatoes: There are literally hundreds of potato varieties ranging in maturity from early, mid-season to late-season. There are those that are red and white with tubers of various shapes, white fleshed and yellow, and there are fingerlings. There are hundreds of wild types still found in the Andes of South America, including Peru, where potatoes had their origin. It is highly recommended that gardeners purchase certified seed potatoes rather than use cuttings from
potatoes purchased in a market. Certification of seed potatoes means they are free of several serious viral diseases.

- **Kennebec** – This white-skinned potato is one of the best keepers and very disease resistant. It produces heavy yields and is easy to grow.
- **Red LaSota** – This red-skinned potato provides almost half of the red market in the U.S. It has a round tuber, smooth skin and deep eyes.
- **Red Pontiac** – This very productive potato is admirably adapted to our area, has red skin with white flesh and is early to mid-season in maturity. Wittwer produced a bushel per 10 feet of row with green-sprouted seed planted in mid-February and harvested June 20.
- **Rose Finn** – One of the best tasting fingerlings, this medium-sized, well clustered potato has rosy-buff skin and deep yellow flesh. It keeps well and has vigorous vines. Be careful not to over crowd.
- **Yukon Gold** – This potato is very early and has yellow flesh.
- **Yellow Crookneck** – This yellow variety has a buttery flavor and firm texture. Big plants are late to begin bearing, but then yield consistently over a long picking period.

**Radishes:** Radishes are cabbage relatives that originally came from Asia. Growing radishes is easy and fast, they may be planted in spring, fall or winter. Direct-sow radish seeds where they are to grow, as they do not transplant well, and be sure to thin the young plants or they may not develop. Storage types are best sown in late summer.

- **Chinese White** – This 7 to 8 inch long, white winter radish has a blunt tip and crisp, solid flesh. It is good raw or cooked. This is a tasty heirloom radish that will grow all winter.
- **French Breakfast** – This attractive gourmet heirloom variety with mild spicy flavor has a red top and white bottom. It is more heat tolerant than some others.
- **Helios** – This is a 19th-century European heirloom spring radish is pale yellow and round with white flesh and is quite sweet in flavor.
- **Purple Plum** – Here is one lovely radish with bright purple skin. The globes are 1 1/2-inches and have sweet, crisp, white flesh, which does not get pithy.
**Sweet Potatoes:** Sweet potatoes thrive under a great variety of soil, moisture and climatic conditions. On a global scale, the sweet potato is one of the 20 crops that stand between people and starvation. Nutritionally, it is a good substitute for the common potato with which it shares some properties. Sweet potatoes with deep orange flesh and of large size are often called yams. The true yam, however, is grown only in the tropics and is light yellow, almost white, in color and of much lower nutritive value.

- **Beauregard** – This insect resistant hybrid has a beautiful eating appearance, with copper-colored flesh.
- **Boniato** – This is an excellent grower for the Moapa and Virgin Valleys, with a normal-colored skin, but white, slightly sweet flesh that cooks up looking much like Irish potatoes.
- **Centennial** – America’s leading sweet potato, it is moderately early, has an orange-colored flesh, copper-colored skin and excellent cooking qualities. It’s what you often see for sale in supermarkets. It produces vigorous vegetative growth and strong runners requiring much space.
- **Puerto Rico** – Bush type with weak runners, this potato has a deep-orange flesh.
- **Verdaman** – This bush variety has golden-yellow outside skin that darkens after digging. The inside is the deepest, brightest, red-orange color of all.

**Summary:** We have concentrated on varieties of certain vegetable types; listed below are some considerations before choosing which vegetables to plant.

- **Beets** are two tasty treats in one. You get twice as much for your efforts because the tops (“greens”), as well as the roots, are nutritional delicacies.
- **Carrots** are of highest quality during the cool weather that prevails in the Moapa and Virgin Valleys from October through April.
- **Jicama** is a great crop for the Moapa and Virgin Valleys. They can be planted from spring to summer with plenty of growing season to spare.
- **Onions** are the crop of choice. There is no place on earth more climatically suited for growth, bulb size, appearance, sweetness and productivity of onions than the Moapa and Virgin Valleys.
• **Potatoes** can be successfully grown in the Moapa and Virgin Valleys if planted in late winter or very early spring.

• **Radishes** are a fast, easy crop that can be sown almost year-round.

• **Sweet potatoes** are easy to grow, require less in soil quality, fertilizer and water, and are less afflicted by insects or disease than any other vegetable.

**References**

Climate information from Desert Research Institute for Community Environmental Monitoring Program station at Overton, Nevada available at: http://www.cemp.dri.edu/cemp/climate/?stn=over

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Maurine and Sylvan Wittwer
Sylvan Harold Wittwer, 95, passed away on Jan. 20, 2012.