

# Radishes



Everything you wanted to know about  
these little beauties



## Radishes

### The Seasons

Fast-growing radishes are the first field-grown salad crop of the British growing year. Available from mid-April radishes are harvested all the way through until late October (depending on the weather).

### Land

We grow most of our British radishes on our farms in Norfolk, where we have specialised in radish crops for over 25 years. Radishes don't like too little or too much water which is why they are grown in the Norfolk Fens, where a combination of low rainfall and a light soil that retains the water make for perfect growing conditions.

### Cooking & Eating

Radishes are sometimes sold with their leaves on, tied into bunches, or ready-topped in bags. The leaves can be used in salads but must be used immediately otherwise they begin to wilt. The radishes themselves should be firm and crisp, and kept in the salad drawer of your fridge where they should last for up to two weeks (always remove the leaves before storing).

Radishes are usually eaten raw, on their own as snacks (delicious with a little butter and dipped into salt) or in salads and sandwiches. They can be cooked for a short time, so can be added into stir-fries for the last couple of minutes of cooking, or why not try sprinkling chopped radish onto fresh vegetable soups as a healthy alternative to croutons.

### Preparation

Wash gently to remove any soil. Trim off the tops and tails and slice, or cut into chunks. If eating with a dip, such as mayonnaise leave a little of the green stalk to act as a handle. For added crispness soak in iced water for an hour before use. The tops can be used in salads or cooked like other greens.

### Varieties

Radishes come in many colours, shapes and sizes; from Red Globe and French Breakfast, you'll also find Purples and possibly Easter Eggs or the giant white 'Mooli' or 'Daikon' popular in Asian cuisine. The 'heat' differs according to variety and colour is a useful guide. Paler versions are likely to have a peppery bite, although colour can be affected by growing conditions too. Wet years tend to be milder, while a hot dry summers will bring out the spicy 'bite'.

**French Breakfast:** Distinctive cylinder shape with a white tip and excellent flavour. This traditional French variety was named French Breakfast because market porters in Paris used to eat their radishes with salt and butter as a mid-morning snack.

**Purple:** Their bright colour and mild flavour appeals to children, and they make a great snack.

**Easter Egg:** A mix of pink, purple and white varieties, usually quite mild and crisp.

**Fakir:** Red globe variety with an extra hot peppery flavour, (most commonly grown in Britain).



## **The Ultimate Snack**

With just 5 calories per serving, radishes are officially the lowest calorie food you can eat – only water is as low! And not only do they contain next to no calories, they are also super low in fat. Plus they're a massive 95% water too, making them a great way to help boost your hydration levels. Add to that their crunch factor – perfect for helping you feel satisfied, getting you to chew your food well and ensuring you stay fuller for longer – and their fresh peppery flavour, and you've got one seriously healthy yet satisfying snack.

### **Top of the Swaps**

Replace your daily bag of crisps with Radish - for a 1176 calorie saving! If you swap a bag of crisps for a bag of radishes as your daily snack, not only do you still get a tasty crunchy snack, but you can also save an amazing 1,176 calories – nearly 60 percent of a woman's daily allowance - a week.

### **Radish Calories**

Ok, so we know you're not going to actually swap crisps for radishes, but even compared with other traditionally healthy snacks – see below - radishes are still the top swap, so why not give them a try?

### **Radishes vs. almonds**

Swap almonds for radishes as a daily snack and save 1,036 calories – approximately four and a half Krispy Kreme Doughnuts - a week.

Plus...Radishes have zero fat content so are a much better option than almonds which weigh in at a whopping 13.9 fat/g.

### **Radishes vs. rice cakes**

Swap rice cakes for radishes as your daily snack and save 385 calories – approximately two packs of Maltesers - a week.

Plus...Radishes are 95% water so they win hands down against rice cakes when it comes to helping keep you hydrated. And unlike rice cakes, they also deliver a welcome boost of Vitamin C, potassium and folate.

### **Radishes vs. grapes**

Swap grapes for radishes as your daily snack and save 175 calories – or a Cadbury's Creme Egg - a week.

Plus...Radishes have a higher water content, zero fat and less sugars than grapes.



## Health

### They are low GI

Radishes are a low GI food so they can help to stabilise your blood sugar levels, fill you up and provide you with slow release energy. This is because low GI foods cause a slow and gradual rise in blood glucose level rather than the quick and sharp rises caused by high GI foods. As a result, low GI foods can help you lose weight and help to keep blood glucose levels steady, which is especially important in diabetes.

### They are a zero heroes

Many weight reducing diets, especially faddy diets, can be low in fibre or fruit and veg. A handful of radishes by your desk at work can contribute to your daily dose of fibre and help to curb those cravings. Just 8-10 radishes also make up one of your recommended five daily servings of fruit and vegetables (but remember, radishes can help slimming or weight control only as part of a calorie-controlled diet).

If you follow the Weight Watchers plan, the good news is radishes are a zero ProPoints value food, meaning you can eat them until you feel satisfied. Remember though that portion control is an essential part of healthy weight loss and this points value is for plain vegetables so if you add butter or dips, you need to account for that.

### They are good for your skin

Radishes are full of vitamins and minerals including Vitamin C making them a beauty conscious girl's best friend - if it's gorgeous skin and a healthy body you're after, get these pink beauties thrown into your beauty food regime quick sharp.

### They help with healthy digestion

Raw radishes are rich in a particular digestive enzyme called Diostase. So apart from the fact that you've already got fibre and fluid with other important minerals and vitamins rolled in, these crunchy vegetables can also help improve your digestive health.

### They contain antioxidants

Radishes contain significant levels of the antioxidant vitamin C, which can protect the body from free radicals that may cause cancer; it's also important for bone and muscles as well as your overall immune system.

### They can protect against spina bifida

Women require folic acid (a B vitamin) when they are planning a pregnancy and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Folic acid is crucial to the development of a baby's spinal cord, so a good intake of folate is important to prevent spinal cord defects such as spina bifida. As a source of folic acid, radishes can help boost its level in the diet.

### They can help protect against cancer

Dark coloured fruits and vegetables can help to protect against some forms of cancer. Research from Ohio State University in 2007 suggests that radishes, grapes and other similarly coloured fruit and vegetables can be an effective treatment for colon cancer. The magic ingredient appears to be an antioxidant called anthocyanins which seems to stop the growth of colon cancer cells whilst not affecting healthy cells. Radish extract has been shown to be particularly effective in reducing the spread of stomach and breast cancer cells.



## Meet The Grower

Scott Watson manages one of the biggest areas dedicated to growing radishes in the UK at Feltwell in West Norfolk. Radish growing started at Feltwell in the 1980's when growers in the region were looking for crops which suited the rich black fen soil which is naturally very fertile. Radishes are an ideal crop for this location as the fenland peats retain their moisture, which reduces the need for irrigation and helps preserve the local area's water supply as well as reducing costs.

Radishes have been grown at Feltwell Farm in Norfolk since the 1980's. I was working in the business and when the farmer retired, in 2000, I took over as farm manager.

My busiest time of year is early Summer, from May onwards – although it depends on the weather - and the orders of course!

On an average day at the beginning of the season, the most important thing for me to do is keep an eye on the emerging crops, make sure we're not caught out by any late frosts. I usually start to see the green leaves appear in the ground in late March and enjoy tending to and watching the plants mature until they're ready to produce radishes in April ready for picking. So much is weather dependent – a lot hinges on whether we have a mild spring or a lot of cold rain.

Radishes grow pretty well in a lot of climates, but the land round here is exceptionally well suited, being a good fertile peaty soil, with good moisture retention. This means we don't need to irrigate so often, which preserves the area's water supplies – important in the Fens, which is one of the driest regions in the country! Also, the soil is soft with very few stones, which can damage the radishes at harvest.

We work about 406 hectares - that's cropping area, not the actual farm, as we might get more than one crop from a field in a season. We sell 40 million packs of radishes per year. Each pack has an average weight of 200g – so this averages out as about 8000 tonnes of radishes.

Last year we experimented with some oriental strains of radish e.g. the Watermelon variety but with no success. These varieties aren't used to our weather – and the summer of 2011 was relatively cold and overcast. I will continue to trial different varieties, and to work on improving the existing ones. Trailing a variety doesn't mean that we will go ahead and grow it commercially but it will add to our knowledge which will help us perfect how we grow our staple crops.

A very rewarding aspect of my job is that growing one of the earliest outdoor salad crops of the year, I get to see the results of all that hard winter work sooner than other farmers. On the flipside, a challenging aspect, common to all growers, is that we are at the mercy of the weather and it can be very frustrating when a late frost undoes all your good work.

If I wasn't growing radishes, I'm sure I would still be doing something related to the land – maybe training champion sheepdogs! I started my working life as a shepherd, and I still work with my dogs when I've got time.

As for eating radishes, I think that my favourite variety for just snacking on is French Breakfast. I often eat mine straight from the field, but they're very good the traditional way with butter and salt, and brown bread.

Radishes have been cultivated for thousands of years, originating in China before being grown in Ancient Egypt and Greece. The name, radish comes from the Latin word 'radix', meaning root and not surprisingly, the radish is a member of the mustard family, accounting for its sometimes hot peppery taste.



Traditionally radishes were eaten to stimulate the appetite and to prepare the palate for food, or as an accompaniment to drinks. They were usually served with salt for dipping, with or without brown bread and butter which is still one of the best ways to enjoy them.

## **Radishistory**

Classical enjoyment of the radish

Radishes are grown and consumed throughout the world and have been eaten in Japan, China and parts of Europe. Early records also show the radish was enjoyed in Greece and ancient Egypt where people were paid in radishes while working on the construction of the great Pyramids, but were not cultivated in Britain until the sixteenth century. In Ancient Greece the radish was so revered that gold replicas were made of the vegetable and offered to the god Apollo. The Greeks served their radishes with honey and vinegar.

## **Arrival in England**

The radish found its way to England in the mid 16th century and into Shakespeare's Henry IV (Like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring: when a' was naked, he was, for all the world, like a forked radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife – King Henry IV. Part II. Act iii. Sc. 2.) and records of Europeans eating radishes show that in France they would be served at the beginning of a meal, to clean the palate.



## Fun facts

1. 40m packs of radish were sold in the UK last year. That is roughly 8,000,000 kilos (8,000 tonnes) – 700 more tonnes than the Eiffel tower. It is also equal to 40 blue whales, or even 900,000 crates of beer!
2. If you put all of the radish in 40m packs end to end, it would stretch for 1 billion cm (10,000 kilometres) that would take you from London to New Delhi where you could go and enjoy a famous Kashmiri Radish Curry
3. To see a garden of radishes in your dream, signifies prosperous business and kind friends. To dream that you are eating a radish, denotes that your feelings will be slightly hurt as a result of the thoughtlessness of someone near you. To dream that you are planting radishes, foretells that your heart's desires will be happily realized.
4. Fast growing crop: Radishes are a fast growing crop and grow from seed to eating plant in 25 days, making them the first UK field-grown salad vegetables to come into season in April.
5. Did you know radishes can cure ills? Radishes can help with stomach ache and hiccups (but too many can make you burp .... !)
6. Radish Oil: Radish seeds were an important source of oil in Ancient Egypt before olive trees were introduced to the country. Certain varieties of radish are still grown for oil production today. Although not popular for human consumption (the flavour is very strong) they have potential as a bio-fuel.
7. Night of the Radishes: In Oaxaca in Mexico, December 23rd is known as “The Night of the Radishes” (Noche de Rabanos). The festival features depictions of all kinds of subjects, including nativity scenes - all carved from radishes!
8. Radishes in literature: In the novel ‘Gone with the Wind’ it was after attempting to eat a radish – the only food she could get – that a starving Scarlett O’Hara declared, “As God is my witness, I’ll never be hungry again.”
9. Peter Rabbit – a naughty radish fan: Our very own Peter Rabbit enjoyed his radishes and famously ate a rather long variety known as the Long Scarlet in an illustration from the Beatrix Potter book.
10. Hot weather, hot radishes: If it’s a long, hot summer, you get hotter radishes and similarly when it’s milder you get cooler radishes.
11. Ancient Wages: Radishes, onions and garlic were paid as ‘wages’ to the Ancient Egyptian labourers who built the Pyramids.
12. Giant radishes: Some varieties of radish can grow up to 3ft long, weighing 100lbs (45kg). Needless to say, you’re unlikely to see these in your local supermarket!



## What the experts say

A handful of radishes contains just 5 calories, making them a great healthy snack whether you are dieting or just counting the calories. Radishes can also help dieters reduce portion sizes thanks to the crunch factor. It takes between 10 and 30 minutes for the brain to register the 'I'm full' signal from our stomachs so foods that need chewing, like radishes, slow down eating; this gives our bodies time to communicate the 'stop eating' message, meaning we may eat less and in turn lose weight. In addition, radishes have a lovely peppery flavour, so are ideal as a snack on their own, or with a low fat dip like tomato salsa or a tzatziki made with zero % fat yoghurt if you want to keep calories to a minimum.

*Lowri Turner, nutritionist and TV personality*

I've always loved radishes since I went to France as a kid. There's nothing more summery - whatever the weather - than a plate of fresh radishes, a pat of good butter and some freshly baked bread. Recently I've discovered they're much more versatile - that you can add them to salads or use them as a colourful topping for spreads. And - great for someone who's on a diet - that they're incredibly low in calories.

When it comes to matching wine - and other drinks - with radishes I like to go for wines that are crisp and fruity - fresh-tasting unoaked whites and rosés and light, fruity reds. Light lagers, cider and fresh citrusy cocktails are great too.

In France they'll often put a plate of radishes on the table with a carafe of local wine to sip and nibble as you decide what to eat. It's a nice thing to offer guests at home too before the meal kicks off.

*Fiona Beckett - food and drink matching expert*

According to style bible Vogue, the most fashionable cocktail for spring will be a radish, ginger and vermouth martini, so get mixing!

*Vogue*

While Marie Claire suggest snacking on a handful of radishes as a great way to 'cut out those naughty afternoon snack attacks' in their Lunchbox Diet Tips feature.

*Marie Claire*

Radishes, like those little pots of cress, are one of the overlooked pleasures of the British vegetable repertoire. There are three main kinds of summer radish. Most familiar to us in this country are the almost-spherical globular varieties, which include our common radish, and tend to sweetness. Then there are the French breakfast radish type, longer and blunt-ended with a distinctive white tip. They are less sweet, sometimes with a faint bitterness. Radishes have only one calorie each, so if, like me, you have one too many good meals under your belt, then snack on them plain or dipped in Greek yogurt with a sprinkling of toasted sesame seeds and salt. Read more of Xanthe's Telegraph article on radishes.

*Xanthe Clay - Food writer for the Daily Telegraph*

A radish with bread and butter is one of those modest pleasures that is as nourishing to the soul as tomatoes and salt or salami with gherkins. It was their destiny to find each other for man's joy.

*Valentine Warner, TV presenter and author of 'What to Eat Now'*

To eat them raw, just wash the roots and have them with sea salt. To help the salt stick smear the radishes in some salted butter.

*Sarah Raven - Food writer*





Crisp, peppery little summer radishes are indeed the perfect way to kick-start a meal, bold enough to set the gastric juices flowing, yet barely denting the appetite.

*Sophie Grigson – Author of The Vegetable Bible*

I love, too, the generous bunches of radishes at the market, their leaves tied with rubber bands, their tips as clean and white as snow.

*Nigel Slater, chef and presenter*

Peppery, breakfast radishes are full of flavour now. Trim away all but a small stub of their stems for ease of eating. They are gorgeous munched for breakfast in the Victorian style with potted shrimp, watercress and plenty of buttered toast.

*Sybil Kapoor, Waitrose Magazine*