Five years ago I produced a TV show about carrots, in which I made a “carrot box”. This was for home gardeners who had trouble raising carrots in heavy, clay soils. The box was filled with sand, compost and good soil. I took the opportunity to explain rock dusts, such as rock phosphate, granite meal and lime. But it’s not the way I raise carrots.

We have four rows of carrots, each almost 300 feet long. The ground gets the usual treatment – well limed and well composted. Carrots like an aged compost and need a loose soil that’s easy to penetrate. Minerals are important too. The ground rocks from apatite, granite and limestone add valuable phosphate, potassium, calcium and many trace elements. The whole garden gets the same treatment.

“Plant early in spring as soon as the ground can be worked” turns out to be bad advice. Yes, you can plant carrots early because they are very cold hardy. For 30 years I planted carrots in March. Then a few years ago I planted a second crop in late April and they did fine.

The March plantings are slow to germinate. Carrots will sprout in cold soil, but it takes two or three weeks. Carrots planted a month later sprout up in one week. Carrots planted a month later sprout up in one week. Okay, the first planting is still a week or two ahead, and will mature quicker. But, and it’s a big but, weeds don’t have a problem sprouting in the cold soil. As a matter of fact, weeds grow pretty easily.

Three weeks in spring turns bare soil into a green carpet of weeds, which makes it hard to find a tiny carrot seedling. One of our main research projects here on the farm is how to cut down on time spent weeding. With carrots, the answer is simply plant them later. The late April sowing is up in a week, and we immediately rake the soil away from the row, killing the sprouting weeds. But I’m ahead of myself.

Most burrows are made with a narrow bottom, so the seeds are in a thin straight line. With carrots, and beets, I use a wide hoe and make a four or five inch wide bottom in the furrow, which is quite shallow. I sprinkle the carrot seed, shaking my hand so it scatters over the whole furrow. It’s okay if it scatters outside the furrow, too. Seed is cheap and I buy it by the pound ($16.00 for a pound), so a little waste doesn’t bother me. The important thing is to get a good stand of carrots four or five inches wide, all the way down the row; ideally a half an inch apart.

We rake over the row, and as soon as they’re up we are in there. Once they get their true

leaves, I go over the row with the Farmall. The first hoeings immediately follow, keeping the soil loose so weeds don't even think about sprouting. In a month the carrot tops start helping to shade out the soil next to them, and in two months we're looking like Bugs Bunny.

They are way too thick. Now we thin them by pulling bunches from the row, but leaving a few carrots to mature into bigger ones. At first, a 300-foot row yields five bushels of baby carrots, but last week we got our five bushels in a third of a row, because the carrots are bigger.

Danvers Half-long is the variety we grow, a hardy, big carrot that does well here. We have Scarlet Nantes, too. I've tried many carrot varieties, but they are not all that different. Good soil is where good carrot flavor comes from.

When the TV folks came this spring to film a show on onions, I offered to do one on the beautiful carrot field. Greta said no, we'd already done carrots. She likes shows more for a small home gardener rather than how we grow big quantities. So when they rerun the carrot show, realize that's not how I do it. Don't believe everything you see on TV.