

Skirret—*Sium sisarum* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

Skirret is derived from the Dutch *suikerwortel*, meaning “sugar root.” It is also known as *skirwort*. It is a vegetable grown for its sweet, edible roots. This member of the carrot and parsley family (Umbelliferae) originated in Asia. It is still used widely in China and Japan, but is a very minor crop in the United States.

Description

The plant grows 3–4 feet high and has large, shining, dark green, compound, pinnate leaves. Small, white flowers are produced in umbels. The grayish-white roots grow in clusters from the stem base like sweet potatoes and are 6–8 inches long, cylindrical, and somewhat jointed. They have a sweet taste if well grown, but have a tough, woody non-edible core.

Culture

Plants are usually grown from seeds, which are similar to carrot seed in appearance. Seeds may be planted in seedbeds for transplants or sown directly in the garden. The plants may also be started from root divisions.

Here in Florida, skirret should be sown or planted in the fall, since it is a hardy, cool season crop. It usually requires 6–8 months from seeding to harvest. Space rows 12–18 inches apart, and space plants 6 inches apart within the row. Sow seed ½ inch deep, or set roots 2 inches deep.



Figure 1. Skirret.
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Use

Skirret may be boiled, stewed, or roasted. The fibrous central core must be removed before cooking, although seedlings differ in the amount of core. The core is difficult to remove after cooking. The root texture is firm, the taste is sweet, and the color is very white.

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