



Harvesting and Storing Vegetables

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Most vegetables are at their peak of tenderness and flavor when they are on the small size. It may be fun to grow the world's biggest zucchini but eating it is another matter! Try to harvest almost every day as picking season comes ... picking every day encourages the plant to produce more. Being out in the vegetable garden daily lets you spot signs of trouble with the plant and deal with problems in a timely manner. It helps to keep cultivar information handy so that you have a rough idea of when your vegetables will be ready for harvesting. As a general guide, here are some easy harvest tips:

Corn: Sweet corn is ready to eat when you can feel round kernels beneath the husk and the silk at the top of the ear is drying out. Rush the corn to the pot!

Cucumbers: Cut off the vines when they reach size. Keep picking to increase production.

Eggplant: Pick when purple and shiny. Wait too long and the eggplant will taste bitter.

Green Beans: Pick when the leaves are young and tender for the best flavor and texture.

Lettuce: Pick when the leaves are young and tender for the best flavor and texture. Sow seeds at 2-week intervals for a fall crop.

Melons and watermelons: Pick when the blossom end is slightly soft. Watermelons will “thunk” when wrapped.

Peppers: Pick when they reach usable size and are firm to the touch. The longer on the plant, the more complex the flavor. The first few you pick will teach you how to gauge ripeness.

Pumpkins: Pick before heavy frost when they are full size and firm, leaving a 4” stem Never pick-up or hold by the stem. Stop watering one week before harvest and store in an airy place for 2 weeks.

Squashes: Ready in 2 months, pick squash daily to keep the plants producing. Re-sow in late July for a fall crop.

Tomatoes: There are so many varieties! A tomato is usually ripe when it releases easily from the stem. They will have the most flavor if ripened on the stem but, picked a day or two early, will still ripen indoors.

Root vegetables are more tender when eaten young. The seed packet will tell you when the vegetable should be ready to eat ... when it's time, loosen the soil gently and pull one to check readiness. These cool season crops will taste best if harvested in the cool early morning hours ... they will stay crisp and store longer. This is really important for lettuces, parsley, and radishes. If you can't harvest in the

morning, wait until early evening when the sun has moved off your vegetable garden. Harvest guidelines for cool season crops:

Beets: Harvest when the “shoulders” are showing 1-3” above ground. Dig the roots carefully.

Broccoli: Ready 3 months after seeding, harvest before the plant flowers.

Cabbage: Ready 2-3 months after sowing. Harvest before the heads split.

Carrots: Check the expected size of your variety. Pull when shoulders are 1” above ground.

Chard/Kale: Cut the outer leaves to let the plant keep growing.

Onions: Harvest in late summer when the tops have yellowed and fallen over. Dig the onions and let them dry on a rack. Do not store with apples or potatoes. Shallots and garlic can be harvested, tied together and hung to dry.

Potatoes: Pull new potatoes 2 months after setting out or when the vines start to flower. Large potatoes mature in 3-4 months. Cut away the vines, wait 5-7 days and then dig up.

Radishes: Ready in 3 weeks, the younger the radish, the sweeter to eat. Easy to grow in containers.