

Common Vegetables and Harvesting Guidelines

Asparagus ++Established stand	Watch for spears to poke through soil in early spring. Watch as soil warms, spears will rapidly come up and you may need to check twice daily. Harvest when 6-8 inches and tip is still tight. Snap or cut off at ground level.
Beans ++Bush or Pole (Snap)	Younger beans usually mean better flavor and texture. Start harvesting as soon as you see the bean seeds start swelling inside pod. Pick regularly to encourage production. Bean is overmature when you can break instead of bend area near tip of bean. Harvest by holding the vine with one hand and snapping the bean off with the other hand.
Beets	For beet greens, tear off <u>some</u> leaves from the top of the plant or pull up the whole plant (great way to thin beets) and use. If growing for root vegetables, start checking at 6 weeks. Prime taste is best at 1-3 inches in diameter. Harvest by loosening soil beside root and pulling or digging up. Leave an inch of foliage on beet so it will not bleed while cooking.
Broccoli	Check maturity date on package. As this date approaches check the central head. If the central head is 1 inch or more in diameter, check daily as it will be ready within a week. In addition, look for signs of yellow on the head which indicate that tiny flowers are opening and head should be cut immediately. To harvest, cut stalk 2 inches below head. Watch for side shoots to start producing and cut before flower buds open and to stimulate production of more side shoots.
Cabbage ++Head	Maturity date is at least 60 days from transplanting. Check when head reaches the size of a softball by squeezing and if firm, it can be cut. Harvest by cutting leaving the lower leaves and as much stem as possible to encourage another small head. Napa cabbages should be at least 12 inches tall. If a hot spell is expected, harvest on the small side rather than waiting.
Carrots	Near the listed maturity date check for pest issues and sweetness by digging one up. A bright orange color indicates carrots are ready but taste will also determine when to harvest. Try to harvest later in the day when they will be at their sweetest. In hot weather carrots should be harvested within a few days of reaching the bright orange color. In cooler weather, they can be left in the ground for weeks. Harvest by loosening the soil around a carrot with a garden fork or spade and then pulling up the carrot by the top.
Corn	Watch for the first silks to appear at the end of the corn husk. About 20 days after this corn should be ready. More signs that corn is mature are the silks on the husks; watch them turn dry and brown. Puncture a couple of kernels on an ear; if the juice is milky, it is ready. Harvest by giving the ear a hard downward twist to detach from stalk.
Cucumbers	Cucumbers can be harvested very small but prime flavor is reached for pickling cucumbers at 2- 4 inches and for slicers at 6-8 inches. Do not allow to get too big as they will turn bitter. Keep harvesting to encourage production. Harvest by cutting off the vine.
Eggplant	Consult seed package to determine how big the eggplant is at harvest which can be anywhere from 2 - 10 inches. When fruit is at ½ of that size you can begin picking. Push skin in, if it bounces back, fruit is ripe. When skin loses its glossy appearance, fruit is overripe and will be bitter. Harvest by cutting off fruit and calyx (usually green) at the stem.
Lettuce ++Looseleaf ++Crisphead ++Romaine ++Butterhead	Looseleaf lettuce is ready as soon as it is of useable size to you. Harvest by tearing or snipping outer leaves and leaving the inner leaves to mature. Crisphead, romaine, and other heading lettuces should be harvested by cutting at ground level shortly after heads have formed. Heads will not be as solid as found in grocery stores. Lettuces will continue to produce useable leaves as long as weather stays relatively cool but once summer heat sets in plants will bolt and become bitter unless grown in the shade of bigger plants or mulched heavily.
Onion ++Green ++Bulb	Green onions can be harvested (by pulling) as soon as they reach useable size. As they mature, they will develop a stronger flavor. Bulb onions are ready for harvest when the tops have died back and fallen over. When 2/3 of the tops have died, push the rest of the tops over, wait a week then dig up. Dig up bulbs carefully as they will bruise. Keep the tops with the onions intact and let them air dry in a sheltered area for 2-3 weeks (curing) before storing otherwise use immediately.

Peas ++Snap ++Snow ++Shell	Check the base of the plant because first mature pods usually form here first. Snow peas should be tender and not break when bent and will have very small peas forming inside pod. Snap peas will be ready when the peas inside the pod have swelled but before they become overly large and hard. Shell peas should have a bright green pod with the pod filled out with peas and pod should not be waxy. To harvest use two hands, one to hold vine and the other to pinch the pod off the vine.
Pepper ++Sweet ++Hot	All peppers both hot and sweet can be harvested as soon as they reach useable size. Peppers must be picked frequently to encourage more peppers. Although hot peppers can be picked at green stage, they will not develop full taste and heat until they have turned their mature color which can be red, orange, black and even purple. To harvest all peppers, cut off of the vine. Do not pull as pepper stems are brittle. When harvesting hot peppers wear gloves as the pepper's heat can be transferred to skin and eyes by rubbing.
Potato	Check your maturity date. Potatoes can be harvested small to use as new potatoes by watching for flowers on vine, then digging up a plant or two and using. Be careful not to disturb other tubers. Main crop potatoes are ready about 2 weeks after tops of potato vines have died back. If the tops do not die back, cut them at ground level and wait 2 weeks for potatoes to harden their skins. Dig up with a garden fork in dry soil. For storing potatoes, cure before storage.
Pumpkin	Pumpkins can be left on the vine until the vines have yellowed and withered away. Light frosts will not hurt them. Wait for the rind to become hard and reach mature color. Harvest by cutting from the vine.
Radish	Begin pulling spring radishes as soon as they are large enough to use. Once they get too big, they become woody and strong tasting. Once they bolt (send up flower stalks) in hot weather, pull up and destroy.
Squash ++Summer	Start picking summer squash as soon as the fruits are large enough to use. Skin should be glossy not dull. Do check seed package as some types can get longer. Do not let them get too large or they become corky and it will also reduce the plant's productivity. Yellow crookneck squash is best when it develops a warty skin. White scallop squash is best <u>before</u> the skin becomes cream-colored. Harvest by snipping at stem but leaving about an inch of stem at the end. Check other squashes underneath for soft spots and harvest these first.
Swiss Chard	Leaves are ready when they reach 5 inches. Harvest by breaking off or cutting the outer leaves at the base The plant will continue to produce new growth from the center. Be careful not to damage inner leaves. Continue to harvest leaves regularly or leaves will become tough.
Tomato	Watch carefully and pick tomatoes when the skin appears glossy and shows an even red color. However, when the temperature gets too hot, red pigments are not produced and tomatoes may still have yellow, pink or orange "shoulders." Go ahead and pick these! In addition many heirloom tomatoes mature before they reach an even color. Tomatoes picked too early will be harder and less sweet. Tomatoes picked past their prime will lose some of their flavor. Harvest by pulling or snipping tomato off the vine. Keep picked tomatoes out of sun.
Watermelon	Determining the maturity of a watermelon can be hard. About 35 days after full bloom, the melon should be ready. Other signs are to look for the "ground spot" to turn from white to yellow or cream color, the tendrils near the fruit stem yellow and die back and the rind takes on a dullish cast. The melon will also give off a hollow "thud" when thumped. Harvest by snipping off the vine.

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