

Harvesting Your Garden Tip Sheet

You've planted your vegetable garden, battled drought, bugs and weeds, you've watered diligently and your plants are producing. But when are they ready to be harvested?

General Tips for Harvesting

- Make a list of the maturity dates for your vegetable plants
 - Information found on the seed packet or on the label
 - Make notes on your garden calendar to start observing those plants as they reach their maturity dates
 - Try not to harvest too soon or too late
 - Harvest right before using or preparing
 - Unfortunately, trial and error is the best teacher
- Use sharp clean tools
- Harvest early in the day
- Harvesting Tools
 - **Gloves.** These will help protect you from brambles and thorns as well as any plants that naturally irritate the skin. Paired with a long sleeve shirt, you should remain itch free in all your gardening endeavors.
 - **A Sharp Knife.** Helpful for cutting vegetables such as squash, broccoli and cabbage, a sharp pruning knife should be a part of your harvest equipment.
 - **Hori Hori.** This tool is highly valued by professional landscapers who use it for cutting woody stems, transplanting, mixing soil amendments and more
 - **Scissors.** I know, I know this is similar to a sharp knife. I'm just bringing it up because they can come in really handy when cutting herbs and leafy vegetables.
 - **Pruning Shears.** The ideal tool for harvesting crops with woody stems like peppers, pumpkins and squash.
 - **Spade.** Particularly important if you're harvesting root veggies, but be careful. A little careless digging can result in broken and damaged crops.
 - But the best tools are still a **gardeners' hands!**

Harvesting Your Garden Tip Sheet

Harvesting the Vegetables

- **Beans**
 - Snap beans, which can be bush or pole beans. And can be green or yellow or even multi-coloured, should be harvested once the pods are a good size but still young and tender
 - Beans that are eaten for their immature seeds should be picked when the pods are full and the seeds fleshy & moist e.g. lima beans, broad beans, soybeans, fava beans
 - Shell beans which are grown for dry beans should be left on the plant until the plant starts to die back, then the entire plant is cut off at ground level and hung to dry
- **Beets**
 - Beets are tender when young but can become woody as they mature; when shoulders protrude above the soil they are ready to harvest
 - You can also harvest your beet greens without pulling up the entire plant; just remove a few leaves from each plant and use them fresh in salads or as a steamed green
 - Young small beets can mature in 45 days while the longer-season storage beets will mature in 80 days
- **Broccoli**
 - Difference in size of broccoli heads dependent on whether it is a head only variety or one that also produces side shoots
 - Harvest your broccoli before the flower heads start to open as at that point the flavour and quality will decrease rapidly – when the head is 10-18cm across
 - Cut the head and about 10-15 cm of stalk below it
 - Most varieties will have side-shoots that will develop after the main flower head has been harvested and give you a continuous harvest for several weeks
- **Carrots**
 - Big bushy tops on carrots are no indication that the carrots are ready to be harvested
 - Look for the shoulders at or just below soil level
 - Pull gently or use a digging fork
 - Mature carrots usually take 75 days before they are ready to harvest

Harvesting Your Garden Tip Sheet

- Carrots can be stored in slightly moistened sand in a cool cellar for longer term storage
- **Greens**
 - Kale can be used as baby kale in salads as soon as you have 5 or 6 leaves on the plants
 - For both Kale and Collards harvest outer leaves throughout the season
 - Spinach is a cool season crop so pick the leaves until the plants start to flower then pull up; make sure you sow successive plantings
 - Swiss Chard matures quickly and a few leaves can be harvested from each plant all summer long until the plant is killed by frost
 - Head lettuce should be harvested when the heads are firm and plump
 - Leaf lettuce, mesclun and arugula can be harvested by picking a few leaves off each plant or by cutting 5-10 cm above the ground and they will produce new leaves
- **Corn**
 - Ready to harvest when tassels turn brown and kernels are plump
 - Pull husk back slightly to check kernels
 - Use heirloom varieties as quickly as possible
 - To ensure maximum sweetness, immerse freshly picked corn cobs in ice water as soon as possible after picking and leave until ready to cook
 - Corn comes in early, mid and late season varieties, so make sure you know which type you are growing
- **Cucumbers**
 - Mature in 45-60 days
 - Pickling cucumbers – pick young and small
 - Slicing cucumbers – pick when mature or when young
 - Cucumber vines will continue producing if you pick regularly
- **Eggplant**
 - Usually start producing fruit in 50-60 days
 - Choose short-season varieties
 - Skin should be glossy and thin
 - Cut fruit cleanly from plant with a sharp knife
- **Leeks & Onions**
 - Most leeks mature in 100 to 120 days

Harvesting Your Garden Tip Sheet

- Dig leeks once they are 2.5 cm wider or larger
- Onions can be harvested as needed throughout the season
- Bulb onions for storage need to be dried
- **Peas**
 - Garden peas ready 3 weeks after flowering
 - Edible pods ready at 5-7 cm long
 - Use scissors or pinch them off
- **Peppers**
 - Peppers need lots of heat to develop so pick the warmest spot in your garden
 - Mild peppers 70 days+
 - Hot peppers even longer
 - Harvest when large enough to eat
- **Potatoes**
 - Potatoes are early, mid and late season
 - Tubers form as plant flowers
 - New, small potatoes can be dug after flowering
 - Leave plants to die back for storage potatoes
 - Main crop potatoes should be left in the ground until the plants have withered and before the first hard frost
 - Leave to dry for a few hours on the soil then brush the dirt off
 - Store the tubers in a cold, dark place
- **Radishes**
 - For spring or salad radishes, they should be picked as soon as ready for best flavour, which deteriorates quickly if left in the ground too long
 - Radishes can bolt in hot weather causing the roots to develop an unpleasant flavour
 - Choose icicle radishes which are more tolerant of hot weather than the round varieties
 - Successive sowings every 2 weeks throughout the summer will ensure a steady supply of radishes
 - Winter radishes can be stored like carrots in a cool, dry location
- **Squash**
 - Summer squash taste best when picked young
 - The more you pick the more they produce
 - Harvest winter squash carefully just before first hard frost

Harvesting Your Garden Tip Sheet

- Cure winter squash for long-term storage
- **Tomatoes**
 - Pick the fruit as soon as it is ripe
 - Ripe tomatoes pull easily from the vine with a gentle twist
 - Green tomatoes can also be ripened indoors
 - Under-ripe tomatoes will keep longer
- **Fresh Herbs**
 - Basil, coriander, parsley, dill, chives
 - Harvesting leaves throughout the growing season for best flavour
 - Choose the lowest or oldest leaves for most flavour
 - Select young leaves for milder flavour

Enjoy your harvest!