

LC 324

VEGETABLE HARVEST & STORAGE

The rewards of summer labors are now available in our gardens and correct harvesting will give a nutritional and tasty pay-off. For most vegetables, bigger is not necessarily better. The line between under-ripe, ripe and overripe can be a thin one with crops like corn, cucumbers and snap beans.

Generally speaking, harvest in the morning, as soon as the dew is off to assure maximum flavor. Try to avoid harvesting wet plants, as this can quickly spread disease.

- ◆ Harvest snap **beans** as the pods begin to swell. Dry **beans** should dry on the vine, if possible. If rains start, they can be hung in a protected area to finish drying.
- ◆ **Beets** are good for greens or bottoms, but taking too many greens may eliminate the bulbous roots. Beets are ready to harvest from 1 inch in size until they begin to get woody. Beets also store well.
- ◆ **Broccoli** must be cut before the clusters turn pale or begin to loosen. Winter sprouting broccoli does not form firm heads. By carefully cutting the head and leaving the plant, many mini-broccoli may be harvested later. Broccoli plants will survive frosts well.
- ◆ Harvest **brussels sprouts** from the bottom up. Break off leaves as the sprouts begin to get crowded. Brussels sprouts will also survive frosts well.
- ◆ Harvest **cabbage** when the head is firm. If rains start, crack the root system by twisting to prevent splitting. Heavy frost will ruin the head. Young, unheaded plants overwinter well, especially Savoy types, for early spring feasting. Cabbage also stores well at just over 32° Fahrenheit.
- ◆ **Carrots** may be eaten anytime up to full maturity and store very well. The tops are excellent for flavoring.
- ◆ Cut **cauliflower** just as the outermost curds begin to loosen. Miniature cauliflowers will often appear later around the cut edge. Cauliflower is also a good overwintering crop, harvested in April and May.
- ◆ **Corn** is close to ready when the silks wither and begin to brown. If the kernel juice is milky-thin, it is perfect for eating.
- ◆ **Cucumbers**, like **zucchini**, should be picked every 2 to 3 days once they start producing. If not harvested regularly, production will slow or stop, as soon as seeds begin to mature in the fruit. All **summer squash** are harvested the same as cucumbers.

- ◆ **Greens** like **swiss chard**, **kale** and **collards** may be harvested as needed, although kale and collards will have a better flavor after a frost or two. All three greens overwinter very well in gardens here in the valley.
- ◆ Harvest **eggplant** with about 1/2 inch of stem left attached, before the glossy skin fades.
- ◆ If you are lucky enough to have **melons**, the **cantaloupe** is ready if it separates from the stem when lifted. Cantaloupe should have a rich aroma. **Watermelons** are trickier, but generally the nearest tendril will wither and the ground spot will turn yellow. Thumping is rarely reliable. Leave 2 inches of stem and the watermelon will store for quite a while.
- ◆ **Peppers** keep best if 1/4 inch of the stem is left attached. They can be harvested green or red. Hot peppers will be the hottest if allowed to fully mature on the bush, as much of the hotness concentrates in the seeds. Sweet peppers are most nutritious if fully matured.
- ◆ **Tomatoes** are best when fully ripened. If frost threatens, gather all that are mature green and ripen indoors away from direct sun. They keep best if temperatures in storage do not drop below 55° Fahrenheit.
- ◆ **Winter squash** and **pumpkins** are ready when the rind will not dent easily with a fingernail. Leave 1 inch of stem attached. Both keep longer if harvested before severe frost.

COLD STORAGE
(35°- 40° F., 85 - 90% relative humidity)

Vegetable	Approximate Storage life
Asparagus	5 days
Beans: Snap & Lima	5 days
Broccoli	7 days
Cabbage	30 - 90 days
Cauliflower	14 days
Lettuce	10 days
Onion, green	30 days
Peas	5 days
Potatoes	60 - 120 days
Rhubarb	14 days
Root Crops	60 - 120 days
Spinach	10 days
Sweet Corn	3 days
Supersweet Corn	7 days

Snap beans & potatoes should not be held below 40° F.

COOL ROOM STORAGE
(55°- 60° F., 80 - 90% relative humidity)

Vegetable	Approximate Storage Life
Cucumber	14 days
Eggplant	7 days
Cantaloupe	7 days
Pepper	3 days
Pumpkin	60 - 90 days
Squash, summer	5 days
Squash, winter	60 days
Sweet Potatoes	120 days
Tomatoes (ripe)	5 days
Watermelon	7 days

Cucumbers, peppers, watermelons, ripe tomatoes and melons can be held at lower temperatures (45° - 50° F.) for a few days without injury.

Prepared and updated by Pat Patterson, 6/99
OSU/Lane County Extension
Horticulture Program Assistant

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