Harvesting and Storing Garden Vegetables

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WHEN TO HARVEST

To get the most out of a garden, harvest vegetables at the proper stage of maturity. We may freeze or can vegetables as soon as they reach the proper stage; others we use fresh, right out of the garden. Check with your county Extension office for copies of Food Freezing Guide, HE-109, and Home Canning of Fruits and Vegetables, H & G Bulletin No. 8.

The following table gives harvesting pointers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetables</th>
<th>Time of Harvest</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asparagus</td>
<td>Not until third year after planting when spears are 6-10 inches above ground while head is still tight. Harvest only 6 to 8 weeks to allow for sufficient top growth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snap beans</td>
<td>Before pods are full size and while seeds are about ¼ developed, or 2 to 3 weeks after first bloom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lima beans</td>
<td>When the seeds are green and tender, just before they reach full size and plumpness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beets</td>
<td>When 1¼ to 2 inches in diameter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>Before dark green blossom clusters begin to open. Side heads will develop after central head is removed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>When 1 to 1½ inches in diameter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabbage</td>
<td>When heads are solid and before they split. Splitting can be prevented by cutting or breaking off roots on one side with a spade after a rain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cauliflower</td>
<td>Before heads are ricey, discolored or blemished. Tie outer leaves above the head when curds are 2 to 3 inches in diameter; heads will be ready in 4 to 12 days after tying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweet corn</td>
<td>When kernels are fully filled out and in the milk stage as determined by the thumbnail test. Use before the kernels get doughy. Silks should be dry and brown, and tips of ears filled tight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cucumbers</td>
<td>When fruits are slender and dark green before color becomes lighter. Harvest daily at season's peak. If large cucumbers are allowed to develop and ripen, production will be reduced. For pickles, harvest when fruits have reached the desired size. Pick with a short piece of stem on each fruit, if you wish. This helps prevent the slight shriveling that may otherwise take place on the stem end.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eggplant</td>
<td>When fruits are half grown, before color becomes dull.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kohlrabi</td>
<td>When balls are 2 to 3 inches in diameter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musk-melons</td>
<td>When stem easily slips from the fruit, leaving a clear scar. Melon should also have its characteristic odor.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Onions      | For fresh table use, when they are ¼ to 1 inch in diameter. For boiling select when bulbs are about 1½ inches in diameter. For storage, when
tops flower, shrivel at the neck of the bulb, and turn brown. Allow to mature fully but harvest before heavy frost.

**Parsnips**  Delay harvest until after a sharp frost. Roots may be safely left in ground over winter and used the following spring before growth starts. They are not poisonous if left in ground over winter.

**Peas**  When pods are firm and well-filled, but before the seeds reach their fullest size. Edible podded peas should be picked for use when the peas are just beginning to form in the pod.

**Peppers**  When fruits are solid and have almost reached full size. For red peppers, allow fruits to become uniformly red.

**Potatoes**  When tubers are large enough. Tubers continue to grow until vines die. Skin on unripe tubers is thin and easily rubs off. For storage, potatoes should be mature and vines dead.

**Pumpkins and squash**  Summer squash are harvested in early immature stage (between 6 and 8 inches in length except for patty pan which should be about 3 to 4 inches across) when skin is soft and before seeds ripen. Winter squash and pumpkin should be well matured on the vine. Skin should be hard and not easily punctured by the thumbnail. Cut fruit off vine with a portion of stem attached. Harvest before frost.

**Rutabagas**  After exposure to frost but before heavy freeze.

**Turnips**  When 2 to 3 inches in diameter. Larger roots are coarse-textured and bitter.

**Tomatoes**  When fruits are a uniform red, but before they become soft.

**Watermelon**  When the underside of the fruit turns yellow or when snapping the melon with a finger produces dull, muffled sound instead of a metallic ring.

In harvesting produce from some vegetable plants like peas, beans and cucumbers, take care not to damage plants or handle them when wet. Diseases can be spread by handling wet plants. Injured plants may dry up partially and stop producing fruit. Harvest fruiting crops before fruit is dead ripe. Letting fruit become dead ripe cuts down on the production of the plant.

**HOW TO STORE**

Many garden vegetables that are not canned or frozen may be stored. With proper storage you can assure yourself of fresh vegetables during the winter.

For successful storage, however, you must have well-matured, good-quality vegetables. Your storage room must have proper moisture and temperature conditions. Frequent
sorting and removal of decayed vegetables still help preserve your supply.

Harvested vegetables are not dead; they are living organisms that continue to grow during storage. If growth is rapid, food stored in the vegetable soon will be used, quality will disappear, and the vegetable will break down and rot. Proper control of temperature and moisture will retard growth and prolong the storage life of the vegetable.

Not all vegetables require the same conditions for successful storage. They can be separated into the following three groups: warm dry for squash and pumpkin; cool dry for onions, dry peas and beans*; cool moist for root crops, potatoes, cabbage and apples. *Cool dry conditions are particularly important if peas and beans are used in making sprouts.

**Warm Dry Storage**

Furnace room, or upstairs storage rooms ordinarily are warm and dry. Humidity ranges from 50 to 70 percent and temperatures between 40 degrees and 50 degrees F.

Before placing pumpkins and squash in storage, be sure they are fully matured and cured. Keep them in a heated well-ventilated room at 75 degrees to 85 degrees F. for about two weeks after harvest to harden the shell. If weather is warm, this can be done by placing them in small piles in the
field. Cover the piles if it looks like frost. Avoid bruising or scratching the skin.

**Cool Dry Storage**

Unheated storage rooms such as attics or closets are suitable for storing dry beans and peas. Onions can be stored in similar places if the temperature does not get below freezing.

Harvest peas and beans after the pods are mature. Spread them out, dry and shell. Place in bags, cans or jars and store at 25 to 32 degrees F. and 70 to 75 percent humidity.

Popcorn should be thoroughly mature when placed in storage. It is best stored at 25 to 32 degrees F. It may be stored shelled in airtight containers or on the cob. If too dry to pop well, add a tablespoon of water to one quart of corn an hour or two before popping.

Onions should be thoroughly mature. Remove tops, place onions in shallow boxes or trays with ventilated bottoms, and cure outdoors or in an airy shed or room for three to four weeks. Place in storage at 32 to 36 degrees F. and 70 to 75 percent humidity. Onions may be stored in mesh bags hung from the ceiling of the vegetable storage room.

**Cool Moist Storage**

Moist homes do not have cool moist places for vegetable storage. Basements are usually too dry or warm unless there is a special cool, dark ventilated room which is insulated from frost on the outside and the heat of the furnace inside. Such a room may be built in the basement by insulating walls and ceiling and ventilating through a cellar window.

A ventilating flue may be extended from half of the window down to the floor. The remaining half of the window can be replaced with a small wooden door. Outside openings should be covered with wire screen to keep out insects and rodents. In the fall the storage room may be kept cool by opening the ventilators on cool nights and closing them on warm days. Once it is cool the temperature can be easily held between 32 and 40 degrees F. during the winter months. Sprinkle floors with water frequently to help keep the air moist. A slatted floor is useful in providing floor drainage and ventilation. A pan with an inch or so of water also adds humidity to the air.

**Carrots and beets** store very well in ten-gallon crocks or any container that will prevent excessive shriveling. Low storage temperatures between 32 and 40 degrees F. apparently are the key to successful carrot and beet storage. Containers should be covered with a burlap sack or piece of cloth to keep the air moist. If carrots are stored at higher temperatures, completely remove the carrot crown and store carrots in damp sand. Do not trim beets too closely.
They will bleed unless at least one-half inch of the top is left.

**Rutabagas, turnips and parsnips** may be waxed and stored at temperatures between 32 and 40 degrees F. If not waxed, they should be placed in containers or buried in sand to prevent shriveling. Parsnips may be left in the garden all winter and used the following spring.

**Potatoes** should be free from dirt and disease. Destroy any blighted tubers. Seed potatoes may be stored at 32 degrees F, but should not be allowed to freeze. Table stock potatoes should be stored above 36 degrees F. to prevent sweetness. If they do become sweet because of exposure to lower temperatures, their natural flavor may be restored by holding them at room temperature for a few days. Potatoes held at temperatures above 40 degrees F. will start to sprout after two or three months. Sprout-inhibiting substances should be used according to the instructions on the labels. Potatoes treated with inhibitors should not sprout in storage. Do not use for seed.

**Cabbage** should be stored off the floor on shelves or hung from the ceiling in the storage room at 32 to 36 degrees F. Because its undesirable odor often is absorbed by other vegetables, it frequently is stored in an outdoor pit.

**Celery** may be kept for a few months by lifting it out of the garden with roots intact and replanting it in soil in boxes in the storage cellar at 32 to 36 degrees F. Water to prevent soil from drying out, but avoid getting the plants wet.

**Storing Other Vegetables**

**Apples** may be stored safely at temperatures between 32 and 40 degrees F. Select a keeping variety and be sure the apples are well-matured and free from diseases, insects and bruises. Most late-maturing varieties are good winter keepers. Let apples mature on the tree, as they form a waxy protective cover which keeps them from shriveling. Baskets lined with aluminum foil will keep apples from drying out in storage.

**Tomatoes.** The tomato season can often be extended by picking fruits at the pink stage or at the green-mature stage (when they turn from green to light green or white). At 40 to 50 degrees F. pink-stage tomatoes can be kept 7 to 10 days, while green-mature tomatoes can be kept from one to six weeks at 50 to 60 degrees F. Ripening increases with higher temperatures. Just before frost kills the vines they can be pulled and hung in the garage or basement with fruits still attached. Fruit will continue to ripen.

**Parsley and chives.** These two plants may be taken up out of the garden in the fall, potted, and grown as house plants. It is important to take a considerable part of the root system with soil surrounding it. Remove several of the outer leaves of parsley. In addition to beautifying the
kitchen, these plants will supply bases for flavoring and
garnishing dishes during winter months.

WAXING

Waxing vegetables like turnips, rutabagas and parsnips
will prevent shriveling during storage. The temperature
of the storage room, however, must be between 32 and
40 degrees F. after they are waxed.

Wash, dry and trim the vegetables. Heat a large pail of
water that is deep enough to cover the vegetable com­
pletely. Float a layer of paraffin, similar to that used in
sealing jelly, on top of the water. The addition of 10 to 20
percent clean beeswax will toughen the layer and prevent
wax from becoming brittle and cracking off.

If vegetables are very cold when waxed, they may take
up too thick a layer of wax. Roots should be dry and at
room temperature before waxing. Do not leave in paraffin bath for more than three seconds. If layer of
wax is too thick, add salt to the water to raise the boiling
point. This will give a thinner film.

Carrots should not be waxed.

FORCING RHUBARB

Fresh rhubarb with its delicate red color and texture can
be a treat on your table during winter. This crop may be
forced in the basement. If your planting is old and you plan
to replace it, you can use some of the old clumps for
forcing.

Before the ground freezes, remove four or five clumps
and place alongside your house or garage. Cover them with
straw or soil to keep them from drying. After the clumps
have been thoroughly frozen for about two weeks, but not
dried out, bring them inside. Set the clumps in orange crates
or bushel baskets and work moist soil in and around the
roots so they are fully covered.

Place the containers where the temperature is 60 to 65
degrees F. and where it is dark. This reduces the size of the
leaf and causes the development of a long stalk with a
delicate pink color. Water enough to keep the soil moist
but not wet. A darkened furnace room would be an ideal
place for forcing. After three or four weeks, production
will start and continue for about a month. Discard roots
after forcing.

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