



When to Harvest

Asparagus: Begin harvesting when spears are 6-8 inches tall and about as thick as your small finger. Snap them off at ground level and new spears will continue to grow. Stop harvesting about 4-6 weeks after the initial harvest, to allow the plants to produce foliage and food for themselves.

Beans, Green: Pick before you can see the seeds bulging. They should snap easily into two. Check daily. It doesn't take long for beans to go from tender to tough.

Beets: Harvest and eat the greens that you thin out of the rows. It's a matter of personal preference when it comes to the right size for harvesting. They are ready any time after you see the beets shoulders protruding at the soil line.

Broccoli: We eat the unopened flower buds of broccoli, so check frequently, especially as the weather warms up, to ensure you don't let the flower heads bloom. Don't expect your home grown broccoli to get to the size of supermarket heads. Harvest when the buds are about the size of a match head. Use a knife to cut below the main crown to harvest. Once the central crown is harvested, smaller broccoli spears will grow as side shoots.

Brussels Sprouts: The sprouts will mature from the bottom up. You can begin harvesting once the sprouts are at least an inch in diameter. Harvest by twisting off or cutting the sprout from the stem.

Cabbage: The cabbage head will feel solid when gently squeezed. Cabbage needs to be harvested when it reaches maturity or it will continue to grow and split open. Use a knife to cut at the base of the head. Large cabbage leaves that surround the head can also be harvested and used like cabbage.

Carrots: Carrots can be hard to judge. The tops of the carrot will show at the soil line and you can gauge when the diameter looks right for your variety. If the diameter looks good, chances are the length is fine too. Pull one to be certain. Carrots can be left in the ground once mature. A light frost is said to improve and sweeten the carrot's flavor.

Cauliflower: Like broccoli, your homegrown cauliflower heads will probably not match supermarket size. Harvest when the head looks full and while the curds of the head are still smooth. Cut at the base of the crown with a knife.

Corn: About 3 weeks after silks form, they will dry and brown. Kernels should exude a milky substance when pricked.

Cucumber: Check daily and harvest young. Timing and length will vary with variety. The fruits should be firm and smooth. Over ripe cucumbers can be very bitter or pithy, even before they start to turn yellow.

Eggplant: Slightly immature fruits taste best and should be firm and shiny. Cut the fruit from the plant.

Garlic: Cut scapes off as soon as they mature, this encourages bulb formation. Garlic tops will fall over and begin to brown when the bulbs are ready. Dig, don't pull, and allow to dry before storing. Brush off the dirt instead of washing.

Kale: Kale leaves can be harvested throughout the season. They should be a deep green with a firm, sturdy texture. Kale flavor is best in cooler weather. Harvest the largest outer leaves on a plant by simply grabbing a hold of the stem and pulling down.

Kohlrabi: For the best texture, harvest once the kohlrabi bulb has reached about 2-3 inches in diameter. The bulbs become tougher as they grow and age. Pull or slice at the base.

Leeks: Harvest leeks when they are about 1 inch in diameter.

Lettuce, Head: Harvest once the head feels full and firm with a gentle squeeze. Hot weather will cause it to bolt or go to seed rather than filling out. Pull the entire head out.

Lettuce, Leaf: Harvest the outer leaves once the plant has reached about 4 inches in height. Allow the younger, inner leaves to grow. Leaf lettuce can be harvested in this fashion for most of the summer.

Melons: There are many varieties of melons, but a general rule of thumb is that the color should change to beige and the fruit will slip from the vine when lifted. You should also be able to notice a sweet smell when ripe.

Onions: Onions can be dug once the tops have ripened and fallen over. Brush the dirt off rather than rinsing and allow the onions to dry in the sun.

Parsnips: Parsnips taste best if they are left in the ground until after a frost or two. They can be left in the ground over the winter and harvested in the spring. In cold areas, they should be mulched for the winter.

Peas: The pea pods should look and feel full. Peas are sweeter if harvested before fully plumped. Peas really need to be tasted to determine if they are sweet enough.

Peppers: Each variety is different, but generally, peppers should be harvested when they turn the expected color. Carefully cut the pepper from the plant.

Potatoes: 'New' potatoes can be harvested when the tops start to flower. Carefully dig at the outer edges of the row. For full size potatoes, wait until the tops of the potato plants dry and turn brown. Start digging from the outside perimeter and move in cautiously to avoid slicing into potatoes.

Pumpkins: Once the pumpkins have turned the expected color and the vines are starting to decline, check to make sure the skin has hardened enough that poking it with your fingernail will not crack it. Do not pick your pumpkin too soon because it will stop turning orange once it's cut, but don't leave them out in a hard frost either.

Radishes: Radishes mature quickly. You will see the shoulders of the bulbs popping out of the soil line. If left too long, they will become tough and eventually go to seed.

Rutabaga: The bulbs should be about 3 inches in diameter, generally about three months after setting out. Rutabagas can be mulched, left in the ground and dug up as needed. Cold weather improves their flavor.

Swiss Chard: As with leaf lettuce, cut the large outer leaves at the base of the stem—being careful not to cut new growth—and allow the center to continue growing.

Spinach: Spinach goes to seed quickly. Harvest by cutting at the soil line before you see a flower stalk emerging.

Squash, Summer: Pick young and check often. The skins should be tender enough to poke with your fingernail.

Squash, Winter: Color is a good indicator of winter squash maturity. When the squash turns the color it is supposed to be, cut from the vine. Do not let winter squash be exposed to frost.

Tomatoes: Harvest when they are fully colored and slightly soft to the touch. Gently twist and pull from the vine.

Turnips: Turnip shoulders should be about 2" in diameter at the soil line when ready. Over ripe turnips are woody.

Watermelon: The white spot on the bottom of the melon should change to a deep yellow when ripe. You may hear a change in the sound made when the melon is thumped with a finger. It should make a hollow sound when ripe.

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