

Harvesting Tips for Common Garden Fruits & Vegetables

Arugula- Harvest loose in or in bunches. If harvesting loose use scissors or knife to cut largest and healthiest leaves. If harvesting bunches, cut whole tap root just below soil line. Band into bunches, peeling off any yellowed or wilted leaf. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Basil- Harvest either by leaf or in bunches. For loose basil pinch or cut above next set of leaves. For bunches cut stalk at base or above next set of leaves and band in bunches. It is best to wait to wash basil until using it in the kitchen.

Beets- Read size of root by size of leaves or by crowning shoulders. Select largest beets. Pinch off browned or wilting leaves. Band in bunches with leaves attached. Submerge in cold water, rinse roots, allow leaves to drip toward dry. Store in plastic bag in cooler. If just harvesting beet roots, remove greens, knock off excess soil and store in cool place. Wash off roots before use in the kitchen.

Beet Greens- When just harvesting greens look for the smallest beets with the most vigorous and healthy looking greens. Pinch off browned or wilting leaves, avoid leaf spot or rusting on leaves. Band in 1-inch diameter bunches. The idea is to thin the beet crop, leaving a healthy plant every 4 inches. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Blueberries- Do not harvest during rain or heavy dews. Harvest bright blue berries with no red or scarlet flush. Avoid under ripe, white berries, and 'mummy berries', which have shrunk. Try to leave as much white flush on the berry as possible. Cull any underripe, overripe or mummy berries. Be sure to pick out any leaves or twigs that might have gotten into the berries.

Broccoli- Using knife cut the head of broccoli leaving 4-5 inches of stalk. Cut only heads with tight clusters, avoid those that are bolting, loose or damaged. Cut away any leaves on stem. Take care not to bruise heads. Submerge in cold water, drip dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Brussels Sprouts- Either harvest by sprout or by stalk. Select firm, tight sprouts to break off in a downward motion from stalk. If harvesting stalk, cut with clippers at base, use knife to trim excess branches and leaves. Try to make uniform stalks. Cut away any diseased or overripe sprouts.

Cabbage- Select firm, tight heads. Pull head to one side and cut close to the base. Cut away excess leaves, leaving a few layers of outer protective leaves to prevent bruising while processing and shipping. Cut stem near flush to base.

Cantaloupe- harvest when cantaloupes are entirely brownish gold with no green showing. The fruit will roll off the vine. Harvest when fruit slips off the vine easily.

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Carrots- either harvest entire row or select for largest carrots judging by thickness of green tops and crowning shoulders. For individual harvesting rotate carrot while pulling upwards. Use carrot fork approximately 6 inches from roots to prevent snapping. Band in bunches of 10, with band at shoulder. Collect all small or malformed carrots for bagging, leaving tops in the field. Submerge in cold water, drip dry, store in cooler.

Cauliflower- cut with sharp blade, leaving a couple inches of stem. Harvest largest, tightest heads that do not display any browning, yellowing or bolting. Cut away any leaves on stem using a circular motion close to the head.

Cherry Tomatoes- Make sure hands are clean and dry before harvesting cherry tomatoes. Roll fruit off the branch; remove calyx and place gently into a container. Do not harvest one at a time, but rather in bunches. Avoid rough handling and split fruit.

Cilantro- harvest either loose or in bunches. Cut just below soil line using scissors and keep clean of weeds. Band into bunches. Immediately take to a cool or shady place as wilting occurs quickly.

Cucumbers- Do not pick up, move or shift plants, only move leaves so as not to break tendrils. Ripe slicing cucumbers should be 6-10 inches long, evenly shaped and 1 ½ -2 inches in diameter. Ripe pickling cucumbers should still retain their prickly spines but should be about 3-5 inches long and evenly shaped. Neither should show signs of yellowing, mold or cuts. Cut vine above cucumber with scissors, taking care not to snap stem off cucumber.

Collards- harvest either in baby or adolescent age as loose leaf or bunch as adult with 8 leaves to a bunch. Snap off leaf from plant at stalk in a downwards motion and bunch, with each leaf facing forward. Do not harvest leaves that show signs of yellowing or insect infestation. Immediately place bunches in shade. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Dill- harvest loose or in one inch bunches. Cut above ground line before plants begin to flower, or cut around bolted plants for fresh stalks. Immediately bring to shade. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Eggplant- Harvest when globes are heavy and shiny, Italian varieties should be pear-shaped, oriental varieties should be uniform and firm. Lift up foliage to find eggplant Cut with strong scissors or clippers above fruit.

Kale- harvest loose in baby or adolescent stage or in bunches in adult stage. Snap leaf off from stalk in downward motion. Always harvest outer leaves, not from the central leader. Remove and discard leaves that are browning, yellowing or show signs of insect infestation. Snap off leaves left below the point of harvest to ensure the plant's health.

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Lettuce- Select the largest heads in the field for harvest. Check heads for signs of bolting and bottom rot. Cut heads as close to lettuce as possible. Peel off damaged or yellowed leaves, trim root stalk. Harvest using a sharp blade. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Muskmelon- Harvest when melons have turned from green to bright white. Roll off vine. Wipe off excess dirt in field. Check for soft, overripe spots, pinholes.

Mustard Greens- harvest either loose or in bunches. Cut at base, being careful to avoid browned or yellow leaves. Use scissors to cut.

Onions, uncured- Select largest onions for harvest. Pull up onions and cut off roots. Cut off any browned or wilted leaves with scissors. Peel off outer layers of onion skins that are dirty or flaking. Collect in bunches of 3-5s. Cut off leaf tops.

Onions, cured- For storage, pull up all remaining onions and gently brush off dirt being careful to not bruise the onion bulb. Lay in single layer in a dry dark place to allow skins to cure. Once skin is dry and papery, brush off dirt and loose skins, trim tops and roots. Store in a cold, dry, and dark place.

Parsley- harvest in one-inch diameter bunches. Cut individual stalks and bunch using scissors. Immediately take into shade. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Parsnips- Fork up parsnips, knock off excess dirt and bunch above shoulder, 3-5 in a bunch depending on size. Parsnips are best washed just before use in the kitchen.

Peas- Select peas of harvest depending on fullness, or size by variety. Roll off vine, being careful not to tear down the vine and break off calyx. Peas are best washed just before use in the kitchen.

Peppers- harvest depending on color, or size, by variety. Check peppers for sunburn, rot or animal signs. Do not break off stem from fruit.

Potatoes- If harvesting by hand pull up dead plant and dig around root system, being careful not to nick potato with fingernails. Pull up potatoes and place in container. Try to leave as much dirt in the field as possible while keeping the potato skin intact. Do not throw or bruise potatoes. Potatoes store best when they are NOT washed first. Allow potatoes to air dry in shallow layers, lightly brush off dirt and store in a dark, cool, and semi-moist place like a cooler.

Pumpkin- Rub off any excess dirt in field.

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Radishes- Select largest, thinning the row. Knock off excess dirt in field. Pick off browned or yellowed cotyledon leaves. Watch for splits and irregularities.

Raspberries- Harvest as late in the day as possible, when there is little dew on the berries. Be extremely careful when harvesting and select berries that are almost ripe, or will be ripe in the next day. Do not pick rotten or damaged berries.

Rutabaga- Pull up rutabaga, cut off foliage at shoulder and tap off excess dirt from root stalk, cut off excess roots.

Salad Mix- Using scissors, carefully cut above cotyledons in hand size bunches. Brush off bottoms of stems to get rid of any cut, damaged, yellowed or wilted leaves. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Spinach- Cut either as baby spinach in its young stage or as bunched spinach when mature. For baby spinach cut or pinch above lowest set of leaves, selecting only the best looking leaves. For bunched spinach cut taproot underground with scissors, peel off any yellowed, wilting or otherwise damaged leaves. Submerge in cold water, spin dry, store in plastic bag in cooler.

Summer Squash & Zucchini-Harvest when 5-8 inches in length and consistent in width. Harvest paddy-pan squash when 3-4 inches in diameter. Cut squash from plant using sharp knife, making sure to avoid nicking the fruit. Lift out of plant, taking care not to brush spiny leaves which will scar the fruit. Cull any overgrown or damaged fruit.

Tomatoes- Harvest when fully ripened, depending on color and size. Tomato should give way to light pressure but should not be soft. Avoid tomatoes that show signs of disease, sunburn or animal marks. Pluck off stem. Store in a single layer whenever possible.

Turnips- Harvest either as greens or in root bunches. When harvesting green select healthiest foliage, peel off leaves that show signs of yellow or insect infestation. For roots, pull largest turnips and knock off excess dirt.

Watermelon- Check melons daily for three signs of ripeness: the tendril leaf is either wither and brown or has fallen off, the yellow spot on the bottom of the melon has become darker in color and bruised, when tapped, the melon sounds hollow and heavy, like a drum. Roll melons off vine and wipe off dirt. Be careful not to break off stem.

Winter Squash-Harvest when ripe depending on variety. Cut stalk from fruit, dust off excess dirt in the field. Leave 1 inch stem.