

Vegetable Planting and Harvest Tips

Taken from *The Growing Classroom*

Beans, Bush

- Keep sowing every 2 weeks for constant supply of beans. Plants may stop producing beans during extreme heat but will begin again when temperatures decrease.
- Pick beans before you can see bean swelling in pod. Be sure to pick beans frequently (3-5 days) so the crop keeps producing.
- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden.
- Eat raw, steamed, boiled, or pickled in vinegar.

Beans, Pole

- A pole bean is a climbing variety and needs support of a pole, trellis or fence to grow.
- Pole beans often produce for a longer period than other beans.
- Pick beans before you can see bean swelling in pod.
- Pick beans frequently (every 3-5 days) for continual harvest.
- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden.
- Eat raw, steamed, boiled, or pickled in vinegar.

Beans, Shelling

- Shelling beans are grown until the bean and pod is dry. Let the beans completely dry on the stem before harvesting.
- Place dried bean pods on tarp and have kids stomp on them to remove pod or place in sack and strike sack to break beans from shell. Some kids like to hand shell each pod.
- These beans need to be cooked to eat.

Beets

- Sow seed directly in garden every 10 days for continual harvest.
- Thin plants when they are young.
- When beets are 1-2.5 inches in diameter, pull the roots.
- Beets will get woody when overly mature. Beets will keep in ground during frosts.
- Eat raw, pureed, marinated, stewed, or pickled in vinegar. Beet greens may be cooked like spinach.

Broccoli

- Broccoli is a cool season crop that grows best in full sun.
- Pick broccoli when heads form into tight, firm clusters.
- Cut off the head with 6 inches of stem attached. Side heads will form after first head is cut.
- Eat florets and stems raw, boiled, or steamed.

Brussels sprouts

- Plant Brussels sprouts in spring for a fall harvest. Exposure to frost improves flavor and sweetness.
- To harvest, twist sprouts off the stem when 1.5" wide and start with lower ones first. Remaining sprouts will keep on plants through part of winter.
- Eat boiled or baked.

Cabbage

- Plant in mid-summer for a fall harvest. In mild areas sow in fall for a early spring harvest.
- Harvest cabbage heads when they have formed tight, firm heads.
- Eat raw, boiled, steamed, or pickled as sauerkraut.

Carrots

- Sow seed directly in the garden. Thin crowded plants when small.
- Harvest carrots at almost any time in the growth cycle. Carrots will keep in the garden after the first frost, right up until ground freezes in winter.
- If needed, loosen carrots with digging fork before pulling.
- Eat raw, boiled, baked, pureed, or pickled in vinegar.

Cauliflower

- Tie outer leaves around head to protect cauliflower from the sun.
- Cauliflowers are cool season crops that are ready to harvest when the flowerets are tightly formed and dense. Cut the head off the main stem.
- Eat raw, cooked, boiled, or pureed.

Celery

- Requires a lot of nutrients and water.
- Harvest after the stalks have reached a foot or more.
- The inner stalks are more tender and taste best uncooked.

Chard

- Cut the outer leaves close to ground when 8-10" tall. Make sure to leave 4-6 leaves on the plant so it can continue to grow.
- Refrigerate chard for up to two weeks.
- Cook by boiling, steaming, or stir-frying.

Corn (sweet)

- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden.
- For good pollination plant in blocks at least 4 feet by 4 feet.
- Ears are ready to harvest about 20 days after the silks appear or when they turn brown.
- Peel back the husk to and puncture a kernel with your fingernail. If the kernels are fat and juice is milky - white, the ear is ready for eating.
- Eat raw, steamed, or boiled.

Corn (pop)

- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden.
- Do not plant sweet corn in same garden with popcorn; the quality of sweet corn will be reduced if cross-pollinated by popcorn.
- Allow the kernels to dry in field as long as possible before winter rains.
- Harvest kernels when hard and the husks dry. Remove the husks and place the ears in mesh bags and hang in a warm, dry location.
- Once a week, shell a few kernels and try popping them; when test kernels are popping well store ears in cool dark dry place or remove kernels and store in airtight containers.

Cucumbers

- Mound soil into hills; plant 3 seeds per hill.
- Try growing cucumbers vertically on a trellis to increase air circulation and sunlight.
- Cucumbers are tastiest when harvested young before the seeds fully develop.
- Harvest lemon cucumbers when they are light green with just a blush of lemon color.
- Eat raw.

Eggplant

- In northern gardens where growing season is short, start with large transplants.
- Eggplant may develop a bitter flavor when grown in stressful conditions. Pick them while the skins are glossy and before seeds form inside.
- Cut stem, rather than pull from plant.
- Soak eggplant in water for 15 minutes or salt and let sit before cooking to reduce bitterness. Eat baked, pureed, stuffed, or roasted.

Garlic

- Harvest when half to three-quarters of the leaves turn yellow - brown.
- Remove flower stalks to encourage efficient bulb growth.
- Loosen soil beneath bulb before pulling.
- Tie garlic together in bundles of 6 to 10 bulbs; hang them for four to six weeks in shaded, dry, area to cure.
- Mince and use in any dish as flavoring.

Kale

- Pluck leaves of kale on the outside of plant when leaves are 10" or longer.
- To keep the plants in production, avoid cutting center bud or leaves. Frost enhances the flavor.
- Eat pureed, boiled, steamed, or baked in a casserole.

Kohlrabi

- For best texture, harvest kohlrabi bulb when it reaches 2-3 inches in diameter. Bulbs become tougher as they grow and age.
- Pull or slice at base. Bulbous stem and leaves are edible, peel off skin around bulb before eating.
- Eat raw, steamed, boiled, or pureed.

Leeks

- Plant transplants when 4" high.
- Harvest leeks when they are about 1 inch in diameter and before they make their flower stalk.
- Slice open lengthwise and rinse inner leaves.
- Eat in soups, salads, baked dishes, or as a substitute for chive.

Lettuce

- Lettuce prefers cooler weather, in hot weather plant lettuce may go to seed prematurely (bolting).
- Harvest outer leaves of leaf lettuce early to encourage growth.
- Head lettuce is ready to harvest when heads are firm and tight.

Melons

- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden. Melons grow best in hot weather. Harvesting the perfectly ripe melon is not always easy, refer to seed packet information for particular varieties.
- **Cantaloupes:** Pick when heavy and tan. Look for "netting" that is hard and raised and a crack that forms around the stem where it touches the fruit. The stem should slip easily off the vines with a quick pull, but should not have fallen off by itself.
- **Honeydews:** Should have a slight yellow blush and get a bit softer on at the blossom end.
- **Watermelons:** Develop a dull green cast and have a light patch at the bottom that changes from green to light yellow when mature. Also, the leaf on the tendril nearest the fruit turns brown and withers. The skin should be hard, difficult to pierce with a fingernail.
- Eat right in the garden for ultimate satisfaction.

Onion

- Harvest when tops fall over and tips of leaves start to turn brown.
- Pull onions, shake off any soil, but do not wash them or pull off outside wrapper leaves. Store in dry area to cure for about a week.
- Use raw, blanched, boiled, baked, or just about any dish.

Parsley

- Long germination and growth period.
- Soak seeds over night before planting.
- Harvest parsley as soon as plants are growing vigorously.
- Snip outer stems from plants; they will produce new growth.
- Parsley dries and freezes well. Can be eaten dried or fresh.

Peas

- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden. Harvest peas daily to encourage vines to keep producing.
- **Shelling Peas:** Pick them when the pods are rounded and the peas have filled in pod, but before they grow tough. Pods are not edible.
- **Snap Peas:** Pick when their edible pods begin to grow rounded, plump and juicy, but before they get tough.
- **Snow Peas:** Pick them when the pods have grown to 2-3 inches but are still flat.
- Eat raw, boiled, steamed, or stir - fried.

Peppers

- Sensitive to cold and harsh sun. In extreme heat, shade peppers by planting in a dense block.
- Peppers are edible when they're green, but most don't develop full flavor and mineral content until they turn from green to orange, yellow, or red.
- Eat raw, boiled, baked, stuffed, or stir-fried

Potatoes

- When foliage starts to wither and die, the tubers should be fully grown and ready to harvest in a couple of weeks. Let soil dry down a bit to help cure potato skin and dig up with a spading fork before first frost. Do not wash potatoes before storing; rather just brush off dirt.
- Potatoes that are nicked or bruised during harvest don't store well, so eat as soon as possible.
- "New potatoes" can be harvested before the plant begins to die back. New potatoes should be washed and eaten shortly after harvest.
- Always cook potatoes, the raw starch is mostly indigestible. Boil, steam, or bake. Leaves are not edible.

Pumpkin

- Pumpkins prefer to be sown directly from seed in hills, 3 - 4 seeds per hill. Leave plenty of room for vine sprawl (6 feet for bush types and 10 to 12 feet between vining sorts).
- Do not pick pumpkins until the vine begins to turn brown and dry. Then cut vine 3 - 4 inches above pumpkin.
- Leave pumpkin in sun for a week or two to cure. Eat baked, boiled, or pureed. It is easiest to remove pumpkin flesh from skin after baking.

Radish

- Sow seed directly in garden every 10 days for continual harvest.
- Spring radishes should be checked frequently because of quick maturation. Will get woody when over-mature. Pull radish roots when 1-2 inches in diameter.
- Eat raw, stir-fried, or pickled in vinegar.

Spinach

- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden.
- Plant every two weeks for continual harvest.
- Harvest larger outer leaves early in morning when crisp, or cut whole plant at base.
- Keep cool. Will "bolt" and go to seed in hot weather.
- Wash well. Eat raw, pureed, stir-fried, steamed, boiled, or in baked dishes.

Squash, Summer

- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden.
- Pick frequently when fruits are small. Skins should be tender enough to poke fingernail through.
- Pick zucchini no larger than 6-7", patty pan squash at 2-3", and round zucchini at 3-4".
- Skin can be eaten along with the inside. Eat raw, boiled, baked, roasted, or in soups.

Squash, Winter

- Sensitive to transplanting, consider sowing directly in garden.
- Grow throughout the season and harvest when plant materials die back in fall and the squash skin is hard.
- Most winter squash store well. After harvest, store in cool dry.
- Eat boiled, baked, or pureed in soups. It is easiest to remove squash flesh from skin after baking.

Tomatoes

- Prefers warm weather although nighttime temperatures over 90 degrees can prevent fruiting.
- Harvest when fruits are full color.
- Eat raw, stuffed, stewed, boiled, baked, or pureed. Leaves are not edible.
- Great crop to comparative taste fresh vs. store bought.

More information on planting and harvesting vegetables can be found at: <http://www.burpee.com>, <http://www.garden.org>, <http://gardening.about.com>, <http://www.organicgardening.com>; <http://www.reneesgarden.com>