

Guide to Harvesting

Biggest is not always the best:

Most crops can be harvested many times if only the part of the plant that is ready is harvested. This is not always when the vegetable is at its largest size. The ripe times vary with vegetables and it's important to know them for the crops you are growing.

It's very important to harvest crops at their proper maturity to ensure optimum quality produce, as well as their peak flavor and nutrition. This is not always when the vegetable is at its largest size. Check your garden frequently for ripe vegetables before they have overgrown.

Handle plants with care:

Avoid bruising and damaging vegetables as this causes a faster rate of decay. Also damaging the plant like stepping on a vine or breaking stems creates openings that potential diseases can enter the plant. Also walking through plants with wet leaves helps spread plant disease, therefore try to harvest vegetables when they are dry.

Maintain Diversity in the Garden:

As in nature, maintain diversity in your garden to protect the health and productivity of a community of plants. This will also ensure that a higher success rate of all plants in the plot while having a lower chance of pest infestation due to the diversity in the garden.

Harvesting Times:

Tomatoes- Tomatoes are a red glossy color when ripe and are able to ripen off the vine, pick tomatoes as they have almost completed turning color so they are not as fragile and are not damaged during harvest or packaging. Tomatoes can also be picked at a pink color and put into a cool place out of direct sunlight to ripen as well if needed to be harvested.

Tip

Grow tomatoes in high tunnels or under row cover. Keeping the plants covered keeps the leaves drier, which reduces diseases common in tomatoes such as blight and septoria leaf spot. Growing tomatoes under a physical barrier to protect from weather and pests can significantly increase yields and quality.

Greens- This includes collard, Mustard, Kale, Chard- cut outer leaves when 6 to 8 in. long and the ends of the greens should be cut with sharp knife or scissors at the ends. Do not bring us greens that are yellowing or wilted.

Okra- about 4 to 5 days after the flower wilts, the pods are ready to pick at 3 to 4 inches long. The pods stop producing if not picked, so gather every 1 or 2 days to keep up production. Do not bring okra that has grown over 5 inches because at that point it's very tough.

Radishes- pull up radishes when about 1 inch in diameter, if they are left too long radishes become hot and tough

Beets- picked for beets and greens, when green are 4 to 6 in tall and beets 1.5 inches in diameter. If only harvesting for beets, wait 1.5 to 3 inches in diameter.

Summer Squash/Zucchini- fruits should be picked at 6 to 8 inches long. After that, continue to harvest them every 2 to 3 days to pick them at the desired size.

Cabbage- harvest when heads are firm and before mature head splits

Jilo- pick Jilo when 2 to 3 inches and a full green color and before it starts turning yellow or red.

Maxixe- pick up maxixe cucumbers after it fully turns a a vivid green color and right before they turn yellow

Winter Squash/ Pumpkin-pick fruits when they are full size and the plant has died, pick up before frost and store

Important note: Make sure to bring the same quality crops to wholesale that you would for your own customers and markets!

Companion Planting tips:

Companion planting is when you have two or more crops growing next to each other to enhance nutrient uptake, pest management.

Planting herbs like basil, dill, cilantro, and parsley can attract predatory or parasitic beneficials, which are natural enemies of garden pests.

In addition, herbs and most flower species will attract pollinators to pollinator-requiring crops so that the plant is then able to produce fruit.

Marigolds are known to have natural biochemicals that repel many pest species, including those that infect from the root of the plant.

Intercropping/ Interplanting:

Intercropping is when you pair plants with different growth habits, nutrients requirements, and rates of maturity to maximize yield within a growing space.

Commonly used in gardens is planting corn, pole beans, and winter squash often referred to the three sisters because of their growth habits these three grow really well together in the same space

Check out these links:

<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/tog/harvest.cfm>

<https://extension.unh.edu/resource/growing-vegetables-tomatoes-fact-sheet-1>

<https://ag.umass.edu/home-lawn-garden/fact-sheets/companion-planting-in-vegetable-garden>