

## **HARVESTING TIPS FOR LATE SUMMER AND AUTUMN VEGETABLES**

Home gardeners often have difficulty determining the best time to harvest their crops. Some vegetables are harvested at the immature stage, while others are left to ripen on the plant. Here are some tips for harvesting vegetables.

Harvest broccoli before the flowers open while the floret is still in a tight head. Smaller side stalks will develop after the center stalk is cut. Broccoli is highly perishable so harvest in the morning and immediately refrigerate.

Harvest Brussels sprouts when the firm heads are firm and 1-2 inches in diameter.

Cabbage heads should be harvested when they are firm and have reached an acceptable size. They should be picked before they crack or split.

Carrots are ready when they are 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Depending upon the variety, harvesting can begin in July and continue until after the first frost.

Cauliflower harvesting varies with temperature. Warm temperatures make the heads ready in only a few days after blanching. Cooler temperatures may require up to two weeks to mature. For best results, harvest cauliflower before the first frost and refrigerate immediately between 32 and 40 degrees.

Harvest head lettuce once the heads reach acceptable size. For leaf varieties, lettuce and spinach should be picked as soon as the outer leaves are big enough to eat. Leave the inner leaves which will develop and can be harvested later.

Muskmelons should be harvested when the fruit separates easily from the vine.

Harvest onions when the tops brown and fall over. If you need to harvest them sooner, knock the tops down and let brown.

Peppers can be harvested when immature or when they have fully developed their red, yellow or orange color. Once peppers are harvested, do not store them at less than 50 degrees. Peppers can be used fresh, dried whole, or crushed.

Time of maturity of potatoes varies by variety. Indicators of ripeness include vine death, skin set, meaning the skin does not separate from the flesh when pressure is applied. For long term storage, wait for the tops of the potato plant to die down before digging them up. Then, cure potatoes at 60 degrees and high humidity for two to three weeks and then lower the temperature to 40 degrees.

Harvest sweet corn when the silks are dry and the kernels are plump, which occurs about three weeks after pollination. Harvest early in the morning and then cool for best results.

Tomatoes should be left on the vine until they have developed their full color and flavor. Watermelon is ripe when the tendrils on the stem near the fruit are dry and brown.

Harvest pumpkins before the first frost, when the pumpkins are hard. A light frost will improve the flavor of squash, and winter squash. Pumpkins and squash should be picked with the stems on.

Ref: MSU Master Gardener Training Manual, Vegetables P. 38 to 64.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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