

SELECTING, PREPARING, AND JUDGING QUALITY VEGETABLES

Almost everyone judges vegetables on a regular basis. Choosing vegetables from the produce section of the supermarket is a judging process. The consumer picks the size, color, type, etc., from the vegetables displayed which he or she judges to have the best eating qualities. Home gardeners judge when each vegetable has attained the optimum size or stage of maturity so that it can be harvested and used while offering the highest food value and the best edible qualities.

Commercial truck farmers not only judge the proper maturity for harvesting, but also prepare the vegetables so they look their best for sale. Growers, packers, and produce marketers all dress and handle the vegetables to retain high quality and an attractive appearance.

Selection and preparation of vegetables for exhibiting at garden shows and fairs are the same skills used in the harvesting, cleaning, and marketing of vegetables. These skills include selection of vegetables at the proper maturity to provide the best eating qualities, and preparing them to present the most attractive appearance possible. The "dressed" exhibits are then judged against other exhibits and displayed for public viewing. Garden exhibits are a learning experience for both the exhibitor and the viewing public.

This publication is for use in selecting, harvesting, dressing, and/or storing fresh vegetables properly.

Tips on Dressing and Handling Vegetables

- Dirt detracts from the appearance of vegetables, but it is not always advisable to wash vegetables to clean them. Tender-skinned vegetables, such as snow peas, summer squash, and eggplant, should not be washed but can be cleansed by lightly brushing with a soft-bristled paint brush. Root vegetables will have less soil adhere to their roots if dug from relatively dry soil.
- If washing is necessary, soak the roots in cool water and gently wash with a stream of water or a soft cloth.
- Remove tops from root vegetables as soon as they are dug. The tops draw moisture from the roots and will cause them to shrivel if left attached.
- If vegetables are to be transported a distance or stored for a prolonged period, protect easily damaged vegetables by wrapping them individually in tissue paper or newspaper (summer squash, eggplant, ripe tomatoes, etc.).
- Most vegetables are best when harvested fresh and used promptly. Harvest as close to time of use as practical to keep storage time to a minimum. Many vegetables can be kept fresh longer by enclosing them in a plastic bag.

Where to Store Vegetables

Different vegetables require warm, cool, or cold storage to maintain top quality. Some vegetables should be stored moist, and some vegetables should be stored dry. The following are some of the combinations of temperature and humidity, and suggestions as to where to find these conditions at home.

Cold, moist storage (32°/40°), high humidity): These conditions fit the vegetable crisper in your refrigerator or storage in plastic bags in the refrigerator. For short periods, pack in boxes with chipped ice.

Cold, dry storage (32°/40°), low humidity): This is the condition on open shelves in the refrigerator.

Cool, moist storage (40°/50°), high humidity): Unheated garage, storage shed, or crawl space under home and covered with a moist cloth or enclosed in plastic to retain moisture. In western Washington, many vegetables can be given cool, moist storage by burying them in shallow trenches in the garden.

Cool, dry storage (40°/50°), low humidity): Open racks in garage, storage shed, or crawl space beneath house. Maintain good air circulation around open racks, or bed vegetables into dry sawdust or vermiculite

in cool area.

Warm, dry storage (50°/60°), low humidity): Dry basements, heated garage, closets adjoining outside wall of house, or other "cool" corner of the home.

In the following table, there are four columns of information after each vegetable listed. The first column lists the optimum size and condition for that vegetable to have the best flavor, texture, and nutritive value. The second column lists some of the common quality faults to look for when selecting or judging vegetable quality. The third column tells how to harvest and dress the vegetables for exhibit or display, and the last column lists the best storage conditions to maintain the quality between harvest and use.

Vegetable	Optimum Condition	Quality Faults	Preparation	How to Maintain Freshness
Artichoke, Globe	Tight, solid buds with good green color.	Loose, overmature, with purple flowers showing. Slug or insect damage.	Cut buds cleanly with 2 - 3" stems.	Cold, moist storage.
Artichoke, Jerusalem	Uniform, smooth-skinned tubers.	Dirty or broken skins. Insect damage.	Dig carefully. Wash tubers gently in cold water.	Cold, moist storage.
Asparagus	Compact spears 3/8" in diameter or larger and 6" long. Uniform color.	Spears branched, wilted, undersized, or varied in color.	Tie in 2"-diameter bunches top and bottom. Trim butts square with 1" white showing.	Stand bunches in 1/2" water. Cold, moist storage.
Beans, dry	Clean, uniform seed of the same variety.	Shriveled, cracked, or broken beans. Trash, stones, or insect damage.	Clean to remove all foreign matter and damaged beans.	Dry storage.
Beans, lima	Uniform, well-filled pods. Fresh, bright green.	Misshapen or poorly filled pods. Yellow, dried, rusted, or insect-damaged pods.	To remove dirt, brush with soft-bristled brush or soft, dry cloth. Do not wash.	Avoid prolonged storage. Cold moist storage.
Beans, snap	Straight, fleshy tender, well-filled pods with seeds about half mature.	Crooked, broken, poorly filled or overmature pods. Pods wilted, rusted, or damaged.	To remove dirt, brush with soft-bristled brush or soft, dry cloth. Leave stems attached.	Pick in the cool of the morning. Cool, moist storage.
Beets	Smooth, round, uniform, medium- to small- sized roots. 2- 2 1/2" optimum. Longer beets should be the same	Blocky or angular shape, rough skin, oversized, insect damage.	Trim tops to 2". Remove small side roots, but do not cut taproot. Brush to remove soil or soak and gently wash in cold water.	Cold, moist stor- age.

	diameter.			
Broccoli	Dark green, crisp heads with tight buds.	Buds opening or showing yellow color. Wilted heads, hollow stems, insect damage.	Rinse with cool water.	Cold, moist storage
Brussels Sprouts	Clean, medium-sized, firm compact sprouts. Uniform size and green color.	Loose, open sprouts. Yellow or pale green color. Wilted or insect damage.	Trim all sprouts uniformly. Wash in cool water/	Cold, moist storage.
Cabbage	Solid heads, heavy for size. Small midveins	Cracked or wilted head. Insect damage or frass. Shiny peeled heads.	Remove only damaged leaves. Leave at least two layers of outer leaves. Cut stem square, no more than 1/2" long.	Cold, moist storage.
Cabbage, Chinese			Heading, or Pe-tsai varieties should be prepared and are judged like head lettuce. Non-heading, or Pakchoi types can be treated like chard	Cold, moist storage.
Carrots	Uniform roots, true to size and shape for variety. Deep orange color and smooth skin	Purple or green shoulders; pale color; forked, crooked or cracked roots; insect damage	Trim tops to 2", remove soil by brushing or wash in cold water. Remove side roots and taproot to 1/4" diameter	Cold, moist storage.
Cauliflower	Firm, white, smooth head at least 4" in diameter with 4-6 leaves to protect curd.	Discolored, "ricey" or dirty head. Insect damage, hollow stem.	Trim outer leaves slightly above head. Brush off dirt with soft brush	Cold, moist storage
Celery	Large, firm stalks with uniform petioles. Butt white and trimmed close.	Spindly petioles, wilted leaves, dirt between petioles.	Trim off roots to base of stalk. Wash in cool water. Trim tops square.	Cold, moist storage.
Chard	Clean, fresh, dark green leaves with bright, tender petioles.	Wilted, poorly colored leaves. Insect damage.	Pull entire plant. Trim off root with tapering; cut near crown. Wash in cold water	Cold, moist storage.
Corn, sweet	Well-filled, plump, uniform ears with straight rows of kernels. Milk stage maturity.	Worm of bird damage, immature or overmature kernels. Poorly filled ears.	Trim shank to 1" from base of ear. For exhibit or display, remove husk from 1/3 circumference of ear.	Cold, moist storage.
Cucumber	Deep green fruits of	Misshapen or crooked	Do not wash fruits.	Cool, moist

(pickling)	uniform size and shape.	fruit. Insect or mechanical damage.	Brush off soil with soft-bristled brush.	storage.
Cucumber (slicing)	Straight, uniform size and color typical of variety. Fruit crisp, firm, and free of insect or mechanical damage.	Yellow color, oversized, or puffy fruits.	Trim stem to 1/2". Wipe with soft cloth to clean.	Cool, moist storage.
Dill	Light green with mature seed.	Immature with no head of seeds, stemmy.	Cut seedheads with 10-12" stems. Tie in bunches near base and near heads.	Cool storage.
Eggplant	Firm, dark purple fruits with small blossom scars.	Immature fruit, bronze or green color, dried calyx, soft fruit.	Do not wash. Wipe with soft cloth if necessary. Individual tissue wraps prevent scaring of skin.	Wrap individually in soft paper. Cool storage.
Garlic	Uniform, well-shaped, full-sized bulbs. Necks dry.	Missing or broken sheaths; soft necks; discolored or missing cloves.	Dig carefully. Brush off dirt. Do not remove sheath. Cut off roots. Do not wash.	Cool, dry storage.
Horseradish	Well shaped, white large main root. (4-8" preferred.)	Soft or rotted; broken skins; sideroots present; insect damage.	Lift roots carefully. Wash and trim away all side roots.	Cold, moist storage.
Kale and Collards	Tender, green, full-sized leaves or tender tips.	Wilted, tough, or over mature leaves, insect damage.	Pick individual leaves and tie in bundles, or cut entire plant.	Cold, moist storage.
Kohlrabi	Uniform color and size. 2- 21/2" specimens preferred. Leaf petioles attached.	Woody stems, cracks or discoloration, oversize, leaf petioles shedding.	Cut stem 1/2" below ball. Trim leaf petioles to 2".	Cold, moist storage.
Leeks	Long, white shanks. Dark green leaf tissue. (3/4" diameter or more preferred.)	Dry or yellowish leaves. Green or discolored shanks. Insect damage.	Pull plant and wash carefully in cold water. Trim roots to 1/2".	Cold, moist storage.
Lettuce (head)	Medium-sized, firm, crisp heads. Heavy for size. Wrapper leaves intact.	Wilted outer leaves, light for size, loosed heads, insect or disease damage.	Trim butt squarely next to head. Trim off damaged leaves. Leave at least 2 wrapper leaves.	Cold, moist storage.
Lettuce (leaf)	Crisp, tender compact plants.	Damaged or discolored leaves. Dirt between leaves, rust or insect damage.	Pull entire plants, trim off roots to crown; remove damaged leaves; wash.	Cold, moist storage

Melon (cantaloupe)	Pick at full maturity when stem separates readily and completely from fruit.	Bruised or soft spots in rind, attached stem, insect damage.	Handle gently to avoid bruising. To clean, brush gently with soft brush.	Cool, dry storage.
Melon (honeydew and other types)	Well-shaped specimen with a smooth, hard rind. Creamy yellow color.	Deep yellow color, soft blossom end, decay spots on rind.	Cut from vine and trim stem to 1". Do not wash. Wipe with soft cloth.	Cool, dry storage
Mustard greens	Tender, green, full-sized leaves.	Wilted, yellow or blotchy leaves. Flower stalk in evidence. Insect or slug damage.	Cut entire plant or pick individual leaves and tie in bundles.	Cold, moist storage.
Okra	Small, uniform pods not over 3" long. Pods light green and tender.	Overmature large woody pods.	Harvest with 1/2" stems attached to pods.	Cool, moist storage.
Onion (dry)	Uniform, solid, well-curved single bulbs with small, tight necks	Green-colored tops; peeled skin; large, soft neck; double bulbs; diseased or insect damage.	Harvest early and cure thoroughly. Do not remove outer scales. Do not wash.	Cool, dry damage.
Onion (green)	Dark green leaves. Long, straight, white shanks.	Enlarged bulbs, crooked or discolored shanks, dry or yellow leaves.	Remove loose skin, cut tops 4-5" above white shank. Trim roots to 1/2"	Cold, moist storage.
Parsley	Clean, fresh, crisp and dark green.	Dry or damaged leaves, dirt between leaves.	Cut 4-6" long and tie in bunches 1" in diameter (stems.)	Cold, moist storage.
Parsnips	Clean, smooth, firm, well-shaped roots. Light, even-colored skin.	Soft or woody roots, green shoulders, insect damage.	Trim tops to 2". Soak and wash in cool water. Trim off side roots.	Cold, moist storage.
Peas	Plump, firm pods, well-filled, retaining bright green color. Seed sweet and tender.	Pods shriveled or drying. Insect damage. Seed shriveled, starchy, or bitter.	Pick with stem, rinse with cool water to clean	Cold, moist storage.
Peas (edible pods)	Tender, flat pods with seed just beginning to form.	Seed maturing, pods swelled or damaged. Pods tough.	Pick with stems. To remove dirt, brush with soft brush.	Cold, moist storage.
Peppers (bell)	Firm with dark color (red, green, or yellow), uniform size, color, and number lobes	Wrinkled and shriveled specimens. Sunburn, traces on contrasting color. Disease spots.	Trim stems even with shoulder fruit.	Cool, moist storage.
Peppers (other)	Well-colored, uniform, and true to type.	Wilted, sunburned, insect or disease damage.	Trim stems even with shoulders of fruit.	Cool, moist storage.
Potatoes	Uniform, clean,	Sunburn (greening),	Dig from dry soil,	Dark, cool, dry

	smooth skin, and true to type with shallow eyes.	growth cracks, knobby, insect or disease damage.	brush off dirt with soft-bristled brush. Do not wash.	storage.
Pumpkin	True to type in size, shape, and color. Thick flesh (heavy for size). Clean, hard rind.	Misshapen fruits, scars and blemishes, light weight for size.	Wipe and polish with soft cloth. Leave stem attached.	Dry, warm storage.
Radish	Medium-sized, firm, crisp, uniform roots; true to type in size.	Wilted or soft roots, insect damage, growth cracks.	Gently wash in cool water. Trim tops to 1". Wash in cool water.	Cold, moist storage.
Radish (winter)	Spongy or pithy roots, insect damage, sunburned crowns.	Spongy or pithy roots, insect damage, sunburned crowns.	Pull as needed, trim tops to 1". Wash in cool water.	Cold, moist storage.
Rutabaga	True to variety in shape and color. Smooth skin and firm flesh. (3-5" diameter preferred.)	Irregular shape, forked or branched roots. Soft or shriveled. Insect damage.	Cut tops to 2". Leave 2" of taproot. Soak and wash in cold water.	Cold, moist storage.
Spinach	Plants with fresh, dark green leaves. Leaves attached to crown.	Spindly, damaged, or wilted leaves. Insect holes.	Pull entire plants, trim off roots to crown, remove damaged leaves. Wash.	Cold, moist storage.
Spinach New Zealand	Fresh, green leaves and tips.	Yellow, dried or wilted leaves. Insect or slug damage.	Cut 4" tips from stems. Keep leaves attached and tie stems in bundles.	Cold, moist storage.
Squash (summer)	Uniform specimens true to variety in size, color, and shape	Large, overmature fruits. Scarred skins, missing stems, wilted or soft fruits.	Cut with 1" stem attached. Do not wash. Clean by brushing with soft-bristled brush.	Wrap individually in paper to prevent scarring. Cool, moist storage.
Squash (winter)	Medium to large fruits true to variety in size, color, and shape. Rind hard and glossy. Color fully developed.	Immature fruits with light color; soft or damaged rind. Insect and mechanical damage.	Cut with 1-2 stems. Cure at `0 80 degrees for one week.	Dry, warm storage.
Tomatoes	True to variety in size, shape, and color. Smooth skins, firm fruits with uniform color.	Growth splits, blossom end rot, catfacing, sunscald, overripe (soft) fruits. Disease and insect damage.	Pick mature but firm fruits. Remove stems. Clean with soft cloth.	Cool, dry storage.
Turnips	True to variety in size, and shape, and color. 2-3" size preferred. Smooth skin and firm flesh.	Irregular shape, forked or branched roots, insect damage, soft or spongy roots.	Cut tops to 2". Leave 2" of taproot. Soak and wash in cold water.	Cold, moist storage.

Watermelon	Typical of variety in shape and color. Ground spot shows yellowish background color.	Misshapen fruit, scars, ground spot greenish white.	Pick with short stems. Wipe with moist cloth.	Cool storage.
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