

## ASK THE MASTER GARDENER

### Tomatoes:

Pick your tomatoes when they are uniformly the right color; red is red, orange is orange, yellow is yellow. Pick tomatoes when they are firm, before they get soft. Gently twist them from the main stem, don't pull them off. Don't put them on the windowsill to ripen. They may change color, but they won't have the best flavor. Instead, put them into a fruit ripener or in a closed brown paper bag with a ripe apple. They should ripen in a few days, so be sure to check them in a day or two. Don't put tomatoes in the refrigerator: they will lose their flavor. Tomatoes can be preserved by canning, drying or freezing.

### Broccoli:

Broccoli should be picked before the florets start to open and turn yellow. Cut the heads just below the point where the stems begin to separate. After you cut out the main head, watch for side shoots on the lower stalks. They are just as edible and very tasty. Broccoli can be preserved by freezing.

### Corn:

To test corn for ripeness, pull down the husk about one third of the way and press your thumb nail into a kernel. If milk spurts out it is ripe. If there is no liquid in the corn it is past its prime. If the liquid is clear, the corn is not ready yet. The best time to pick corn is early in the morning when the sugar level is at its highest. Keep corn in the refrigerator to preserve its taste. It is best to leave the husk on until you are ready to use it. Corn can be preserved by canning or freezing.

### Green Beans:

Green beans are usually ready to pick about a week after they blossom. Pick them when they are pencil size. Pinch the beans off the stem. Don't pull on the beans, because that can damage the plants. Green beans can be frozen, canned or dried.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.