



WHEN ARE VEGETABLES RIPE?

BEANS (dry) - Wait until production stops, pods are well filled, and dry. Pods should be easy to open.

BEANS (green) - When pods snap readily but tips are still pliable and small beans inside are about ¼ of their normal size, usually one to two weeks after flowering. Pods become more fibrous after this.

BEETS – Start picking when medium-sized (1½ -2” in diameter.) Those with rough ridges or growth cracks are likely to be tougher, but higher in sugar content. Begin main harvest when beets are 2”- 3”. Harvest spring planting in July and fall planting before freeze.

BROCCOLI – When stalks are firm but tender and florets are tight and dark green. Pick before flowers begin to open.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS - Remove lowest leaves for bigger sprouts. Pick when sprouts are firm, compact and bright green. Harvest from the bottom.

CABBAGE - Heads are firm when squeezed and heavy for their size. Harvest before splitting. Early varieties, pointed or conical, may be harvested when heads are three-fourths developed; late varieties should be fully developed and firm.

CANTALOUPE - Ready when the fruit smells sweet and stem gives in to pressure from finger and fruit separates easily from stem. The base color of the rind should be the same color as the netting. The base of the fruit (in contact with the ground), will be golden when fully ripe (not white). Melons will not ripen further once picked.

CARROTS - Sugar content is higher in mature roots (1-2” in diameter), but younger ones are more tender. For eating at once or preserving, pick when small, firm and well colored. Harvest fall crop before freeze and mulch heavily for winter harvest.

CAULIFLOWER - Blanch heads four to twelve days before harvest, when heads are 2-3” in diameter, by tying up outer leaves around the heads. This will minimize discoloration and blemishes. Heads should be firm and clean white (or purple — color disappears in cooking.) Rice-texture, softness, or yellowing florets or leaves indicates over ripening or insufficient water.

CORN - Pick when silks turn dark and are completely dry and the tip of the ear is rounded out with kernels. Kernels should be bright, plump and milky. If small and soft, they are tasteless; if large and hard, they will be starchy and flavorless. Keep cool and cook within one hour of picking.

CUCUMBERS - Best when they are slightly immature, moderate in size, a good green color, firm, and spines are just beginning to soften. They are past their prime if large, puffy, and beginning to yellow. Most varieties are 1 ½- 2 ½” in diameter and 5-8” long. Pickling cucumbers are short and stocky and not as long.

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EGGPLANT - Harvest when fruits are 1/3 to 2/3 fully grown, when color is still bright and shiny. The fruit is overripe when color dulls and seeds turn brown.

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKES - Dig any time at end of the season before ground freezes, or in early spring before growth starts. Be sure to collect all tubers as Jerusalem artichokes can become weedy.

KOHLRABI - Pick when swollen stem is 1½ -2” in diameter. Kohlrabi becomes woody and tasteless if allowed to grow bigger.

NEW ZEALAND SPINACH - Pick only the young leaves or just the tips of the older leaves.

OKRA - Pick pods when they are 2- 3” long, snap easily and are easily punctured. Over mature pods become tough and woody. Require long growing season; difficult in this area

ONIONS - Pick when ¼ -½” in diameter for fresh table use, and 1-1½” for boiling and pickling. Pick for storage when tops have died down. Mature bulbs should not be readily dented by fingers.

PARSNIPS - They are not fully flavored until after early frosts. Moderate size is best as if too large they may be woody. Soft and flabby ones may be pithy. Mulch heavily for winter harvest.

PEAS - Best when still bright green and pods are well filled. Flat, dark green pods are immature and great for stir fry and salads. Yellowish, hard and swollen pods are too old. Peas should be very sweet when eaten raw.

PEPPERS – Fruits are firm, full size, and have a shiny skin when in their prime. Allow red varieties to reach uniform coloring on the vine before harvest. (**HOT PEPPERS**) – Usually grown in a warm climate, grow more slowly with cool weather. Harvest varies by variety and depends on desired color and heat range.

POTATOES - For early, or “new”, potatoes, harvest as soon as large enough, but dig potatoes for storage after tops have died down. Greenish or "sunburned" tubers should be put back in the dark until the green portion has disappeared. Cut away the green portion of the potato and do not eat as the green color indicates the presence of solanine, a toxin. Cure for 10-14 days in a dark, well-ventilated location at 40-50 °F.

PUMPKINS - Harvest when color is good all over and fruits give off a sharp thud when hit with your knuckles. The base of the fruit (in contact with the ground), will be golden when fully ripe (not white). Harvest **before** frost and when vines start dying.

RADISHES - Pull as soon as ½-1” in diameter. Split, overly large, pithy or spongy radishes will be very hot to the taste and woody. Harvest spring radishes before hot weather. For winter crop, mulch heavily.

RHUBARB - Cut leaf stems anytime they are large enough. Throw away or compost the leaves, which are poisonous if eaten.

RUTABAGA - Dig anytime they are large enough, 3-6”, or until the ground freezes. They become dry and woody if soil moisture is inadequate.

SALSIFY - Moderate-sized roots are best. Flavor is improved after early frosts. Large roots are usually woody; flabby ones are fibrous.

SPINACH - Generally, leaves that are 3-4” long and 2- 3” wide are large enough to harvest. Take only a few leaves from each plant for longer harvest time. The young spinach leaves will be the most flavorful.

SQUASH (summer) - Pick when small- to moderate-sized, color is good and rind is easily dented with your

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thumbnail. Large fruits become fibrous and have hard seeds that are less pleasant to eat, though are excellent for making breads.

SQUASH (winter) - Color should be typical for the variety and rind is firm enough so it is not readily punctured by thumbnail. Harvest before first hard frost and leave at least 1” of stem attached. Cure in a dry area 10 days at 75-85 °F.

SWISS CHARD - As soon as leaves are large enough to pick. Harvest just a few leaves from each plant for longer harvest period.

TOMATOES - Pick when fruit is firm but yields to gentle pressure. Ripe tomatoes will come off the vine easily without pulling. Size is no indication of maturity. Fruits will ripen off the vine, but flavor is much better when ripened on the vine.

TURNIPS - Best when they are of moderate size, firm, and fairly heavy, but can be harvested at 1”. Do not leave them in the ground too long - overgrown turnips are tough, woody, and have a strong flavor. Turnips can withstand several light freezes.

WATERMELONS - Ripe when a rap on the side gives a dull, hollow thud; a sharp or solid sound indicates immaturity. This works better on the large varieties, not as well on the midget types. Avoid those with white undersides. The bottom of a ripe melon is golden yellow.

STORING TENDER VEGETABLES

As a general rule, after harvesting vegetables that will wilt, remove bruised leaves, wash, drain well, and store in moisture-proof containers in the refrigerator if they cannot all be used at once.

STORING ROOT CROPS

Many vegetables can be stored for several weeks or even months before they lose flavor and quality. Optimum storage conditions are described in WSU publication EB1326E “[Storing Vegetables and Fruits at Home](#)”

VEGETABLE PRESERVATION

Information on how to preserve the vegetables you grow is available from the USDA National Center for Home Food Preservation website, hosted by the University of Georgia and at your local extension office.