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## *Harvesting Vegetables the Right Way*

There are right ways and wrong ways to harvest. Cutting kale correctly will mean a summer of fresh, healthful greens. Doing it wrong will set you back several weeks. The consequences of twisting a pepper from a plant can be equally calamitous. Seasoned gardeners may assume that everyone knows how to harvest. Not true! Knowing how and when to pick your produce will keep your plants productive, and your kitchen well stocked.

### How to Harvest Your Garden Vegetables



**Cooking Tip:** Roasting brings out the flavor of tomatoes, especially plum tomatoes. To roast, cut them in half and arrange them, skin side down, on a cooking sheet. Sprinkle with olive oil and roast at 350° for about an hour.

**Tomatoes** are ready for harvest when they are slightly soft when squeezed, and fully colored. *Harvest tomatoes by twisting them gently until they separate from the stem.*

Large heirlooms can crack if left too long on the vine. Pick these before they have completely turned color and they'll continue to ripen after harvest. Cherry tomatoes, also prone to cracking, can be picked just before they turn perfectly ripe.



**Cooking Tip:** Prepare raw kale for salad by removing the ribs and slicing leaves into thin slivers. Use an acidic dressing containing lemon juice or vinegar to break down the fibers.

**Kale and Chard** should be cut leaf by leaf. *Don't cut the growing tip, at the top of the plant*— this will put a temporary stop to your harvest. As the season progresses cut outer leaves regularly until frost, or well into winter in mild areas. You can also grow kale as you would baby lettuce, cutting the leaves an inch above the soil level when they are 4 inches high, and allowing the plants to re-grow.



**Blanch green beans 3-5 minutes to prepare them for side dishes. Sauté other ingredients—such as garlic, onions, and red pepper—in olive oil until tender, then toss in the beans. For extra flavor add lemon juice.**



**Use tender young beet greens raw in salads, and braise the larger leaves. To roast beet roots, wrap each one loosely in foil, and place in a 375° oven for about an hour. The skin should peel easily.**



**Cucumber skin is a source of nutrients, so peel the fruit only when necessary. Try preparing juices, salads, and soups without removing the peel. Or remove it partially, leaving some skin between each strip.**



**Boil shucked ears for no more than 5 minutes. To grill, remove the silks but leave husks attached. Brush the corn with oil or butter, close up the ears and grill for 12-15 minutes, turning occasionally.**



**For a quick side dish, cut fruits into thin rounds and sprinkle with salt. After 30 minutes blot them dry, brush with olive oil, and broil 4-5 inches from the heat until browned. Turn and repeat on the other side.**

**Green Beans:** *Grasp the bean where it connects to the vine and pinch it loose from the stem using your thumb.* Don't pull on the bean; it may break the stem. Beans should be harvested when they are slender and crisp, before the seeds form lumps in the pods.

**Beet greens:** *Trim greens (which contain more nutrients and antioxidants than the root) sparingly an inch above the root.* Leave most of the greens to provide energy for the root's growth. Beet roots can be pulled small (1½ inch) or medium-sized (about 3 inches).

**Cucumbers:** *Twisting cucumbers from the vine can damage the plant.* Instead, snip them with garden shears or pruners. Optimal harvesting size depends on the variety but in general bigger is not better; cucumbers develop a bitter taste as the seeds mature.

**Corn:** *Grab the ear of corn, pull it downward, and then twist it off the plant.* Do this in the morning if possible. Corn is ready for picking when the silks turn brown and the husks are still green. The ears should be completely filled out.

**Eggplant:** *Harvest eggplants with shears when they have a nice, reflective sheen.* As fruits get older their skins get tough and dull and the flesh bitter. Size and color are not necessarily indications of maturity, as varieties come in a full range of both.



**Chopped melons make an excellent salsa base. Just add minced jalapeño pepper, red onion, cilantro leaves, and lime juice to taste.**



**To make delicious roasted peppers, place whole fruits in a 450° oven or on a grill until skins are charred, then put them in a covered bowl to steam. In about 15 minutes, the skins loosen and can be stripped from fruits.**



**It goes without saying that lettuces make a great base for fresh salads. For variety, add any or all of the following: Nasturtium blossoms; sprigs of cilantro, dill, or other herbs; roasted nuts; cheese shavings.**



**Winter squash can be eaten at harvest time. Most types (An exception is Acorn squash) can be stored for 3 months or more with no loss of quality. Store squash in a dry, well-ventilated spot, between 50° and 68°F.**



**Versatile summer squash can be used in stir-fries, frittatas and soups. Or it can be grilled, stuffed, or used in baked goods. Squash blossoms, stuffed with a ricotta-based filling are a delicacy.**

**Melons:** *Cantaloupes are mature when the stem separates easily from the vine.* No tools are needed for harvesting. Melons will have a strong sweet smell when they are ripe, and the flesh between a cantaloupe's netting will turn from green to tan. Honeydew melons will have a yellow blush on their ivory rinds when ready.

**Peppers:** *Clip (don't pull) fruits from the plants when they are firm and full-sized.* Peppers are most flavorful when they turn red, orange, yellow, or whatever their mature color is, although many people enjoy them at the green stage as well.

**Lettuce:** *Tender baby lettuce greens can be cut with scissors when they're about 4 inches tall.* Rows of young greens will re-grow for about three cuttings, a week or two apart. Lettuce can also be grown to head-size. Harvest heads before plants start to elongate.

**Summer and Winter Squash:** *All types of squash should be cut from the vine with pruners or a knife.* Twisting the fruits off can cause damage. Zucchini and yellow crookneck squash are at their most tender when no bigger than 5 to 7 inches; patty pan squash is best at 3 inches or smaller. You'll know winter squash is ripe and ready for harvest when the rind is no longer shiny. Test it with your fingernail—if it can be scratched but not punctured, it is mature.

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