

Knowing When to Harvest Vegetables
By Terry Brite DelValle
Special to the Times-Union for 5/7/11


If you are new to vegetable gardening, it may not be obvious when some vegetables should be harvested. It is equally important to know the correct time to harvest vegetables as how to grow them.

You may also discover that certain vegetables are coming in all at one time and neighbors become your best friends. Cool season crops like potatoes, carrots and onions are nearing their harvest time just as warm season crops like tomatoes, pepper and squash are just beginning to ripen.

An excellent reference is the Vegetable Gardening Guide @ <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021> which provides the number of days from planting to harvest. That can all change based on the weather: heat versus cold, sun or shade, and rain compared to drought. The following is a general guideline of when to harvest vegetables grown in Northeast Florida. Check seed packets for additional information as there are many differences based on varieties.

- Asparagus: Tough to grow in Florida but it can be done. Spears are spindly compared to those grown in cooler climates. Cut spears to the ground when 6 to 9 inches long. Stop harvesting after 6 to 8 weeks to allow spears to develop into plants for next years crop.
- Beans (lima): When beans are filled out, green and tender.
- Beans (snap): Full size pods and when beans are 1/4th normal size otherwise become more fibrous and starchy.
- Beets: When roots are 1 ½ to 2” diameter and tops can be used for greens if tender.
- Broccoli: When terminal head is tight and dark green and side shoots when dark green as they develop.
- Brussels Sprouts: Remove lowest leaves to increase sprout size. Harvest bottom sprouts first as they develop size and are still firm/tight.
- Cabbage: Cut or twist when heads are firm. If overmature or heavy rains occur, may split.
- Chinese Cabbage: Cut at ground line when heads reach appropriate size (3-6 lbs.)
- Cantaloupe: When stem slips (separates) easily from fruit, netting turns from green to beige, and/or when smells sweet.
- Carrots: Pull when roots are ¾” to 2” diameter and before summer heat.
- Cauliflower: Cut head when curds are full sized, white, and firm. May need to tie leaves up over developing head when curd is 2 to 3 wide if varieties are not self-blanching.
- Chard (Swiss): Harvest continuously by cutting outer leaves.
- Collards: Cut at ground level or harvest continuously by cutting outer leaves.
- Corn, Sweet: Harvest when silks are brown and dry, about 18 to 20 days after silks emerge. Pull down on ear and twist.



- Cucumbers: Harvest in early morning when green and immature. Size depends on variety and use.
 - Eggplant: Clip with pruning shears when glossy and firm. Overmature fruit are dull and spongy.
 - Kale: Harvest continuously by cutting older leaves.
 - Lettuce, Leaf: Cut entire head or outer leaves for continual harvest.
 - Okra: Clip or snap immature pods 2 to 4 inches long. If spiny, wear gloves.
 - Onions, Green: Pull when needed as they reach appropriate size or to thin.
 - Onions, Bulbing: When 50% of tops fall over and bulbs are 2 inches or more in diameter. Lift and dry for several hours; remove tops and roots and put in warm, dry area for 72 hours. Then store in cool, dry, well-ventilated space.
- 
- Peas, Garden: Pick when pods are full and seeds are full size but immature. Continue to harvest every 2 to 3 days.
 - Peas, Snow: Pick every other day usually 5 to 7 days after flowering and when pods are still flat.
 - Peppers: Clip when fruit are full size but firm. Color will depend on ripeness and variety.
 - Potato, Irish: For new potatoes, dig tubers before plants die. For traditional size potatoes, allow plants to die and harvest 2 to 3 weeks after. Apply no irrigation during this time. Place tubers in dark, cool, ventilated place for 10 to 14 days to cure.
 - Potato, Sweet: Dig before killing frosts and/or when roots reach adequate size. Cure in warm, well ventilated area for 1 week before storing.
 - Pumpkins & Winter Squash: Harvest when fully colored and skin is hardened. Leave 1" of stem attached.
 - Radish: Pull when small and tender for optimum flavor and texture.
 - Spinach: Harvest when leaves reach desired size by cutting entire plant or clip outer leaves near the base.
 - Squash, Summer: Pick when young and tender. Harvest zucchini when 6 to 8 inches long and butternut when 3 to 4 inches in diameter.
 - Tomato: Harvest when color change is uniform and fruit is firm at blossom end. Before a frost harvest green, full size fruit and wrap in newspaper and keep at room temperature to ripen.
 - Turnip: Harvest when roots are 1 to 3" in diameter. If overmature, becomes woody.
 - Watermelon: Hit melon with palm of hand and listen for a dull thud (mature) versus a hollow sound (immature). Bottom of melon changes from white to creamy yellow. Melon color changes from shiny to dull and tendrils near stem end turn brown and dry.