

# Harvesting



How do you tell when things are ready to harvest? These rules of thumb will help guide you.

**ROOTS** will usually crown.

Carrots, turnips, rutabagas, beets, radishes, onions, and parsnips will start to pop up and show their size and goodness by peeking through the soil. Potatoes are the exception (see below). Wait on carrots until their crown is not green.

Some of these vegetables will keep in the soil for some time, even after their tops wilt, if protected with a thick layer of mulch from freezing. It can be a cheap and convenient way to store some vegetables for a short time.



Crowning Root of a Carrot

**FRUITS** should come away easily with a light tug, twist, or bend of the stem.

Apples, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, corn, eggplant, squash, and melons are examples of fruits that should come away without fighting you.

The stem is often a sign that the fruit is ready when it starts to brown and wither. Peppers also take on their characteristic color. Cayenne is not ready until it is red. Jalapenos are ready when they are green, but



generally wait until they are larger than your thumb. Habaneros are usually a reddish orange. Melons and squash are best when the stem dries and withers. Be careful not to pick things like pumpkins or butternut squash while they are still green or have green near the stem. They are not ripe and will not ripen off the vine. Sometimes these vegetables hide under the leaves. Okra is most tender when it is about finger length.

Tomatoes should be kept at room temperature to keep their flavor unless you choose to can or dry them. Peppers can be stored many ways but frequently are stored dried.

Winter squash can store quite well if you keep it cool and dry.

## **BEANS & PEAS**

Beans and peas should be fat, but the pods should not be sunken around the inner seed, but instead fairly smooth. The exception is for storage beans and peas which are allowed to dry on the stalk before harvesting.

## **HEADS**

Heads are red and green cabbage, radicchio, broccoli, cauliflower, endive, and artichokes. Heads should be firm and tight and of good size. Head lettuce is dealt with separately.

## **LEAVES and LEAF STALKS**

Lettuce, celery, chard, kale, collards, pac choi, mustard greens, and leafy herbs are examples of leaves and leaf stalks. They can be harvested at any time, but best before bolting shifts the flavor. Some leafy greens work well as “cut and come again.” This is when you harvest but deliberately leave an inch or two of the root stalks, for the plant to regenerate itself. Another way to do “cut and come again” is to harvest only the outer leaves.



## **BOLTING**

Leafy greens like lettuce and spinach, herbs, brassicas, and many other plants can sometimes “bolt.” Bolting is when the plant prepares to or goes to flower. Before flowering, these plants change chemically to put energy into flowering. They suddenly start to get tall stems and their leaves can become bitter. It is preferable to harvest before bolting. If one plant of a type is bolting it is a sign that the whole bed is about to go, and it is best to “crop out” that bed.

Bolting is more likely to occur as the plant matures, but plants might also bolt if they experience drought or great heat. Cool weather crops are more likely to bolt if planted in the hotter months. Choosing varieties appropriate to the season, sufficient watering and even providing some shade will help reduce premature bolting.

## **STEMS**

Asparagus, kohlrabi, fennel, are also picked for their size and asparagus should be picked while its top is still tight.

## **POTATOES**

Potatoes can be harvested at any time after the plant above ground is of any size, but the potatoes will be small until after the plant starts to flower. Usually, harvest is done when you want to eat some for dinner when you dig with a fork only as much as you need. It can also be harvested towards the end of the season before frost. Some varieties of potatoes work better for storage than others.

## **GARLIC, LEEKS, SHALLOTS, ONIONS**

Alliums can be picked at any time, but the tops will start to bend and flop over when they have grown as much as they will. Though you can eat these immediately, they are also often “cured” by hanging in a dry, dark place with good ventilation for a few weeks so they can be stored without rotting.



## **CROPPING OUT**

Cropping out refers to harvesting all of one plant in a bed at once. There can be many reasons to do this, including when frost is expected, canning, bolting, diminishing flowers and fruiting, or making room for the next crop.