

CHAPTER 12:

HARVESTING



Harvesting means picking the vegetable off the plant when it is ready to eat. Start picking your vegetables as soon as they are ready. Freshly picked vegetables are full of goodness and are the most nutritious vegetables to eat. So only pick those that you can use immediately and keep them in a cool, dark place until you are ready to eat them.

Check out the Planting Guide in Chapter 3 for a guide on the timeframes for harvesting vegetables.

Some harvesting tips:

- ◆ Tomatoes and other fruits should be allowed to ripen on the plant as far as possible. Sun-ripened fruit tastes much better and is full of vitamins.
- ◆ Young vegetables are delicious eaten raw in salads or lightly steamed.
- ◆ Try and grow plants that will keep producing food for you, (these are called 'cut 'n come again' plants) – like spinach, beans, peas, tomatoes, kale, chives, lettuce, celery, basil, Chinese cabbage, New Zealand spinach, peppers, and many others. A couple leaves of spinach or lettuce (the non-heading varieties) and a few stalks of celery can be removed from each plant without causing any harm. With beans and peas, the more you pick the more the plants will produce. Whereas once you pick a cabbage – that is that!
- ◆ Grow plants where you can eat the whole plant. There are lots of examples of these. Eat the leaves as well as the roots of carrots. The leaves are delicious chopped into soups and stews and are full of vitamins; beetroot leaves taste better than spinach; turnip leaves are good in soups and stews and are more nutritious than the root; pumpkin leaves, flowers and young shoots are all edible. You may be able to think of other multiple-use plants.



HARVESTING METHODS

There are different ways to harvest different plants. There are some plants that you should leave on the plant to ripen for as long as possible like tomatoes, because they get their energy from the sun. There are other plants that you only need to take a few leaves from the outside and more will continue to grow, like spinach or lettuce. There are other plants that the more you pick them, the more they will grow like peas and beans.

- ◆ **Harvesting tomato, green pepper and brinjal**

For these plants you must inspect each plant and select only mature fruit for picking (those that look ready). Do this regularly, every 3-4 days. Gently break/cut them where the stem joins the plant.



- ◆ **Harvesting spinach, non-headed lettuce, kale, rocket etc.**

These plants are leafy plants and you only need to harvest a few of the outside leaves of each plant. Don't pull up the whole plant, just take a couple of leaves from the outside of the vegetable every few days. This way the vegetable will continue to grow more leaves and produce more food.



- ◆ **Harvesting beans and peas (legumes)**

When the pods of the beans or peas are looking quite full (not too full/bulging). Take the bean/pea at the top of the pod and break it or cut it off the plant, very gently.

- ◆ **Harvesting butternut and pumpkin**

When the stem of the butternut or pumpkin has gone brown and the leaves are dying back, these vegetables are ready to harvest. There should be no green lines on the butternut (you can see green strips when the butternut is younger).



- ◆ **Harvesting cauliflower, broccoli and cabbage**

These leafy vegetables can be harvested when their heads (the part that we eat) feel firm to the touch and are a good size. If the broccoli starts to look yellow, it must be harvested immediately (it is almost too late). Both broccoli and cauliflower do not like too much hot sun shining straight on them, so it's a good idea to protect them from sun when the heads start to grow. When the vegetable is ready you can take the whole plant out or cut the head and some of the stem off with a sharp knife.



REPLANTING

The ideal situation is to be able to pick some fresh food from your garden every single day, right through the year. This means that at no time should your vegetable beds have any bare spaces.

So as soon as you've harvested a row of vegetables, lightly dig over the row, work in some compost and replant the row with another crop. Remember to rotate your crop so that you're not planting a vegetable from the same family as the one you have just harvested. The way to achieve an even flow of vegetables to the kitchen is to sow frequent small batches every three to four weeks. In this way, you will always have something to eat.



There are online questions you can complete after this section

