Vegetable gardening in September and October

Harvesting! Most vegetables are at their best for a short period of time. This means the vegetables are palatable and have nutrition.

Peas, corn, beans and cucumbers are at their best for a short time. Harvest peas when the pods are full. Beans are harvested when the pods are tender. This means to not let the beans get too large.

Corn should be in the milk stage. Cucumbers are best when harvested at a small size.

With radishes, beets, carrots and turnips, they should be picked also at a small size. Parsnips can be left in the ground for winter.

If you have cauliflower, tie the leaves over the top as soon as the head starts to form.

As for broccoli, as soon as the head is compact, it is time to harvest. Remember, light frosts improve the taste of your broccoli.

If your summer squash is still growing, harvest when it is small and tender. If your endless zucchini is still producing, pick when the fruit is 6-8 inches long. With winter squash and pumpkins, apply the thumbnail test before picking. If your thumbnail can puncture the skin, your winter squash or pumpkins are not ready.

Don’t forget how nutritious and delicious beet and turnip greens are.

A critical tip while harvesting your vegetables

Cutting and bruising your vegetables will cause decay to occur faster. Lettuce, radishes, tender carrots and greens can be crisped by plunging them into cold water immediately after harvesting.

Tasks for October

Understanding storage conditions for your vegetables will keep your harvested vegetables from spoiling. It is best to store vegetables in a dark, cool place.

Check frequently for spoilage when using a basement storage area or room and/or an outdoor storage cellar. Harvest and store your root crops in October.

Clean the garden of any refuse such as leaves and stems.

Harvest and store pumpkins after the frost nips the vines and before the pumpkins are frosted.

Mulch your parsnips by placing a few inches of dirt or leaves over the row.

Onions can be stored in netted bags or on trays in outbuildings that do not get to freezing temperatures.

Critical tips for storing your vegetables

Keep a storage chart handy for vegetables and fruits. Refer to a local Extension Service; they should have access to a chart for temperature and relative humidity requirements.

Correct temperatures for proper storage will lengthen the storagelife for your vegetables. Purchase an outdoor thermostat for the storage area.

Correct humidity will maintain freshness and help prevent some of the shriveling. Purchase a simple humidity gauge for the storage area.

Requirements for storage area

Your storage area should have at least one window for ventilation and with the ability to block out the light.

A basement with a furnace is good for ripening green tomatoes at 65 degrees, but not ideal for vegetable storage.

Store apples and pears in a separate area from vegetables because of the large amounts of ethylene gas they release. Secondly, fruits absorb odors from vegetables such as potatoes and turnips.

Both fruits and vegetables can be stored on shelves or in wooden crates or boxes. If you have flooring that will allow you to place an inch or two deep of sand, this will help you keep the humidity up. You can moisten the sand on a regular basis.

A number of fruits and vegetables need 90-95 percent humidity.

Some fruits and vegetables that need this high humidity include apples, apricots, blackberries, blueberries, peaches, peas, sweet peppers, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, corn and cucumbers, to name a few.

Other alternative storage methods

A second refrigerator or unheated garage areas are other places to consider for storage. Ground storage can take many forms including burying a metal or plastic garbage can with straw and plastic bags around the produce for insulation purposes and odor absorption.

These are all other types of food preservation to enjoy the “fruits” of your labor throughout the year and save on the grocery bill.

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