

# HARVESTING 101

Each vegetable and fruit has different harvesting needs.  
Knowing when and how to harvest is very important!

**Disclaimer:** Bridgeport is located in what is known as a “Temperate Growing Zone,” where we are able to grow cold weather crops and warm weather crops. Due to our four seasons, we cannot grow “Tropical Growing Zone” fruits and vegetables, such as bananas, mangos, and coffee, because our weather does not stay warm year round.

<i>COLD WEATHER CROPS</i>	<i>WARM WEATHER CROPS</i>
Plants that are either frost tolerant or cold-temperature tolerant, allowing them to flourish in temperatures lower than 70°F	Crops that may be injured by a frost but flourish during hot summer months
Examples: kale, collard greens, carrots, peas, radishes, Swiss chard	Examples: tomatoes, peppers, corn, squash, eggplant, cucumbers

## When and How to Harvest in Your Garden

### Important Term:

**Bolting:** Often found during the summer in leafy greens such as lettuce, the plant moves from making leaves to eat to producing a stalk of flowers for reproducing, making the leaves taste very bitter. This is often found in the middle of the lettuce.

### Root Vegetables (Radishes, Carrots, Beets)

Read the seed packet to see how long it should take before checking to see if your root crops are ready.

The leaves will look big (not like a head of lettuce), and you should start to see the top of the vegetable popping through the ground. When it's about time, loosen the soil gently and pull one up to see how big it is.

\* Root vegetables are more tender and delicate in flavor if eaten younger and smaller.

### Beans

#### Lima Beans

Harvest when pods are filled but before they yellow. For tender lima beans, harvest when slightly immature. For meaty lima beans, wait until fully mature.

#### Snap Beans



Pods will be firm and crisp at harvest, and about as thick as a pencil. They should snap when you break one in half. Hold the stem in one hand and the pod with the other to avoid pulling off branches that will produce later pickings.

### **Shell Beans**

Pick when pods change color and beans inside are fully formed, but not dried out. Pods should be plump, firm, and tender. Pick every couple of days to keep plant productive.

### **Broccoli**

Harvest (snap off) the terminal head while florets are still tight and full of dark green color, before flowers open or appear. Florets will regrow.

### **Cabbage**

Harvest when heads are solid; squeeze to test. Cut the stalk at the base of the head with a sharp knife and discard outer leaves. If heads become overmature, they may split. To delay harvest and prevent splitting, pull upward on head until upper roots snap.

### **Corn (Sweet)**

Look for dark brown, soft, unbrittle silks and pick the ears when the kernels are plump and tender and when milky liquid comes out when you prick them with your fingernails. Corn is not ripe if the liquid is clear and watery. If there is not liquid, then the kernels are too ripe and past their prime. Harvest by twisting the ear off the plant in a downward direction.

### **Swiss Chard**

May be continuously harvested by breaking off big, outer leaves. Spring planting will provide greens from early summer to first moderate freeze.

### **Cucumber**

Best when slightly immature, just as the spines soften and before the seeds become half-size, though size will vary with variety. Most varieties will be 1-1/2 inches to 2-1/2 inches in diameter, 5-8 inches long. Pickling cucumbers will be blocky and not as long.

### **Eggplant**

Skin should be glossy and tight. Dull skin is a sign that eggplant is overripe, and the flesh will be tough and losing flavor. Harvest when fruits are nearly full-grown but color is still bright and shiny. Cut fruits from plants with 1 inch of the stem attached.

### **Kale**

Harvest leaves and stems when they reach your preferred size. Frost improves flavor!



## **Lettuce**

### **Head Lettuce**

Harvest entire plant when head feels firm but before the center bolts

### **Leaf Lettuce**

Harvest outer leaves as they attain your preferred size, or slice the entire plant off about 1 inch above the soil line to prompt new growth. Timely picking increases length of harvest (i.e. if you pick the leaves as they are ready, then you will increase the plant's time growing).

## **Peas**

### **Garden Peas**

Harvest when pods are light green and filled out before yellowing. Flat, dark green pods are immature. Use scissors to cut pods from plant or pull them off very carefully. Harvest daily to keep plants productive.

### **Snow Peas**

Harvest when they are full size and seeds begin to show. Do not allow pod to fill out. Use scissors to cut pods from plant or pull them off very carefully. Harvest daily to keep plants productive.

## **Peppers**

### **Hot Peppers**

Harvest as needed. Young, green peppers are hotter than mature, colored ones.

### **Sweet Peppers**

Harvest when fruits are firm, full size, and green. If desired, leave on plant/vine longer to change color to yellow, orange, and red, depending on variety. This will deepen the flavor and pepper will become less crisp in texture. The first few you pick will teach you how to gauge ripeness.

## **Potatoes**

The plants stems and leaves will turn brown as the potatoes become fully mature. Harvest when the potatoes reach your preferred size. If the soil is loose, pull up the brown foliage and use your fingers to explore and find more potatoes.

## **Spinach**

Harvest when leaves attain your preferred size. Break off outer leaves as the plant grows or harvest the entire plant at once.



## Squash

### Summer Squash

Best when harvested young and tender, not more than 6 to 8 inches long and 2 inches in diameter. Skin should be easily penetrated with a thumbnail. Harvest all squash by cutting fruits with 1 inch of stem attached.

### Winter Squash

Harvest when the rind is hard enough to resist puncturing with fingernail, or wait until plants begin to die back. Harvest all squash by cutting fruits with 1 inch of stem attached.

## Tomatoes

Read the seed packet to learn what to expect from the plant.

Generally, a tomato is fully ripe when it releases easily from the stem.

*Fun fact:* If you pick a green or unripened tomato, you can stick it in a sunny window and it will ripen!

## Watermelon

When the spot beneath the melon (where it sits on the ground) turns yellowish, rather than white or green, the melon is close to ripe. The rind also gets tougher, so test with your thumbnail to see how easily it dents. Use the ripeness test for old-fashioned full-sized watermelons: thump and listen for a dull, hollow sound. Harvest by cutting the stem with a sharp knife close to the fruit.

## Herbs

**Annual Herbs:** basil, borage, cilantro, dill, fennel, tarragon, parsley

Harvest throughout the summer by cutting the herb but leave 4-6 inches of the plant for future growth.

**Perennial Herbs:** chives, marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, thyme

Harvest throughout the summer until 2 months before the first frost of fall. Harvest by cutting the herb but leave some for later growth.

## Interested in learning more? Check out these sites!

- <http://www.burpee.com/gardenadvicecenter/vegetables/general-gardening/harvesting-vegetables/article10387.html>
- <http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/factsheets/vegetables/harvestguide.pdf>
- <http://www.weekendgardener.net/vegetable-gardening-tips/harvest-090709.htm>
- <http://www.groworganic.com/organic-gardening/articles/how-to-harvest-annual-and-perennial-herbs>

