



# How to Tell When Vegetables Are Ready to Pick

## General harvest checklist

- Check your garden at least every other day during peak season.
- Harvest in the morning when plants are cool and crisp.
- Use clean, sharp scissors or pruners instead of pulling.
- Ask: does it match the expected size and color for the variety?
- Look for firm, glossy skins on fruits and pods; avoid dull or shriveled.
- Taste a sample—if it tastes good to you, it's ready enough.

## Leafy greens (lettuce, spinach, kale)

- Leaves are big enough to use (about palm-sized for full leaves).
- Plant looks full and leafy, not spindly.
- No tall flower stalk rising from the center (not bolting).
- For leaf types: pick outer leaves and leave the center to keep growing.

## Peas and green beans

- Pods are firm and smooth, not lumpy or bulging.
- Beans snap cleanly when bent.
- Pea pods are plump but still tender and bright green.
- Hold vine with one hand and pinch or snip pods with the other.
- Check every 1–2 days so they don't get tough.

## Tomatoes

- Color is rich and even (little to no green left, unless it's a green variety).
- Fruit feels firm with a slight give when gently pressed.
- Light tomato smell near the stem.
- Twist or snip from the vine; don't yank.
- If frost threatens, pick tomatoes starting to color and ripen indoors.

## Cucumbers, zucchini, summer squash

- Zucchini/yellow squash: about 4–8 inches long, glossy skin, seeds still small.
- Cucumbers: firm, evenly colored, typically 6–8 inches for slicers.
- Avoid very large, dull, or seedy fruits.
- Cut stems with a knife or pruners; don't twist vines.
- In warm weather, check daily—these size up fast.

## Peppers and eggplant

- Peppers: full-size, firm, and glossy; harvest green or wait for ripe color.
- Eggplant: glossy skin, firm fruit, not dull or spongy.
- Cut stems with pruners instead of pulling.

## Root crops (carrots, beets, radishes, potatoes)

- Carrots/beets: shoulders visible at soil line, close to expected diameter.
- Foliage looks mature; older carrot leaves may start yellowing.
- Radishes: roots clearly visible and match packet size.
- Lift one test root; if small but tasty, wait a bit longer for the rest.
- New potatoes: dig a few weeks after flowering for egg-size tubers.
- Storage potatoes: wait for tops to yellow and die back before digging.

## Sweet corn and melons

- Sweet corn: silks brown and dry; ear feels full in your hand.
- Kernels give milky juice when pierced (clear = too early, pasty = too late).
- Melons (like cantaloupe): sweet aroma at stem end, slight “slip” or cracking where stem meets fruit, skin color slightly duller, strong netting.

## Herbs and “anytime” crops

- Herbs: plants are established with several sets of leaves; strong fragrance when rubbed.
- Leafy greens: harvest baby or full-size leaves as long as flavor is good and they haven’t bolted.
- Green onions: pull when they reach your preferred thickness (pencil-thin or thicker).