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# Gardening

## Harvesting keeps gardener happy

By Pat Leuchtman  
leisure Columnist

In spite of the June cold, in spite of the dry season, in spite of weeds and bugs the harvest is coming in almost faster than I can keep up with it. It seems nothing short of miraculous.

Especially so since I had almost forgotten what harvestable crops looked like. (Because of dangerous heavy metals in the soil, we only grew flowers in New York). We've been eating peas, lettuce and chard of course, but I was surprised by the beets.

Even though we love the greens as much as the root, I kept waiting for the greens to get big and lush. They haven't. The soil is not as good as it will be in a year or two, so the vegetable foliage is very modest.

Anyway, while pulling a few stray weeds from between the beet rows, I discovered that not only were the beet greens ready, so were some of the beets. Now I'm busier than ever.

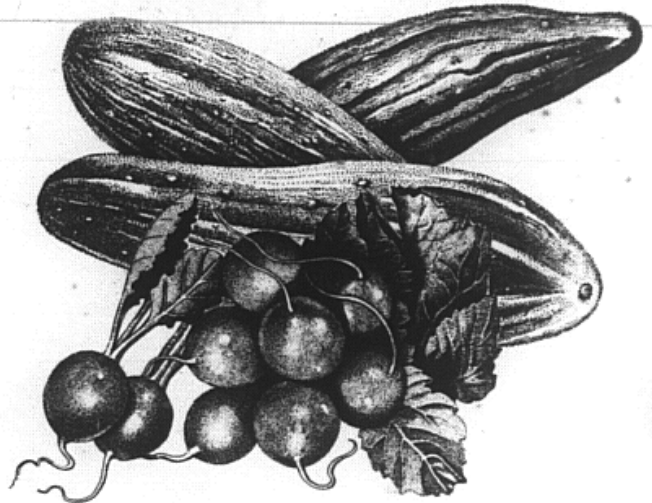
I mentioned this experience to Tina Smith at the extension service and she whipped out a wonderful green sheet prepared by William Bennett and Ronald Kujawski, explaining when various vegetables should be picked. She says its a question she is often asked and I say you have to start by keeping a very close eye on your garden's progress.

Lettuces can be harvested over a long period of time, and cabbage, chine cabbage, endive, kale, radishes, onions, spinach and chard can be picked from the time they are half grown. Pick the outer leaves of chinese cabbage, chard, spinach and kale. The plant will keep producing. And don't worry about getting all the kale in before frost. It actually tastes better after frost.

Watch out for the zucchini, summer squash and cucumbers. Once they start bearing, they ripen fast! Zucchini are considered extra fancy grade when they are six to eight inches long, but if they get away from you, use the large ones for stuffing or for zucchini bread.

At my food coop session this month I was surprised at the amount of flour that was ordered. "But it's zucchini bread time!" The obvious explanation. I should have known.

One of the advantages of having



your own garden is that you can afford the extravagance of picking vegetables at their youngest, tenderest and most succulent. What is more delicious than fingerling carrots, thinned from the row, steamed and served with butter and dill? The carrots that fully mature will be delicious in the stew.

Beets, too, can be thinned and the greens served up with a side order of baby beets.

Broccoli and cauliflower have critical harvest periods. Pick them when the heads are well formed, but before the broccoli flowers open and the cauliflower head begins to break apart.

Early white potatoes can be dug for eating any time they are large enough, after about two months. If you are going to store potatoes, make sure they are fully mature, that the plant tops have completely withered. Potatoes should be dried and stored immediately in a cool dry place.

Onions for storage should also be picked after the tops have died down. Dry them for two or three days and then store in a well ventilated place at room temperature.

It is not quite so easy to tell when winter squash is ripe. When the hard shell of acorn, hubbard or turban squash can no longer be pierced by a thumbnail they are almost ripe. The color should be glossy with some yellow. They should be harvested

before a hard freeze and you should leave some stem attached. Winter squash should be cured at 80 to 85 degrees for 10 days before it is stored where it is dry and the temperature is about 50 degrees. Acorn squash is the exception. It should not be cured, and it will only keep a little over a month, not for the whole winter.

Corn should be picked at its peak. The silks will have dried and the husk will fit tightly when it is ready for harvest. Open an ear and prick a kernel; it should ooze a white fluid called "milk." Don't forget to have the water boiling before you go out to pick. This is a treat not to be compared with eating corn from the supermarket.

My own tip in harvesting is to kneel down and look up. That's where all the ripe peas, raspberries and beans are hiding.

One final note. Harvest time is also preserving time. If you are going to be canning low acid vegetables like beets and corn, be sure to use a pressure canner. Pressure canners can be checked for accuracy at the extension office.

Harvest is also fair time. Next week I will pass on some of Tina Smith's hints for exhibiting vegetables at the Franklin County Fair. If you have not received a Premium Booklet, pick one up at the extension office in the courthouse. □