A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO HARVEST

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How do you know if your vegetables are ready to harvest?

The following guide will help you determine when your plants are ready to harvest based on size, color and shape. This guide shows optimal maturity.
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Sources:

- http://extension.missouri.edu/p/g6226
- http://www.almanac.com/gardening
Asparagus

- **Size:** 6-12 inches tall and less than 1-inch wide

- **Shape:** Tall and slender, bud tips will be very tight

- **Color:** Bright green or white

- **Storage:** Stand asparagus up in a container with 2 inches of water or in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer, store in refrigerator for 1 week
Asparagus is 6-12 inches long

To harvest, cut or break the spears from the point closest to their attachment to the fibrous roots when they are 5 to 8 inches in length and the thickness of a pencil.
Beets

- **Size:** 2-3 inches in diameter, will be about the size of a tennis ball

- **Shape:** Long with round, bulb like roots

- **Color:** Leaves will be green, roots are bright red. Other colors such as yellow are also available.

- **Storage:** Cut off tops and store in a cool, moist area at 33-40 F for 5 months
Beets are 2-3 inches in diameter

To harvest beets by hand, firmly grasp the area where the leaves meet the beet root and give a firm and steady pull until the beet root comes out of the ground.
Bell Peppers

- **Size:** 4 - 5 inches long, the size of a softball

- **Shape:** Will be firm, smooth, and round

- **Color:** Typically harvested when they are immature and still slightly green; can be green, red, orange, yellow, brown or purple

- **Storage:** Store in a cool place around 45°F for 2 weeks, put in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator
Bell peppers are 4-5 inches long

To harvest, use pruning shears or a sharp knife to cut peppers from the plants, leaving a short stub of stem attached. Pulling peppers by hand can cause entire branches to break off.
Broccoli

- **Size:** Head will be 4-7 inches wide

- **Shape:** Slightly round in shape, flower buds will be tight

- **Color:** Dark green or purple

- **Storage:** Store in a cold, moist area at 33-40 F for 2 weeks
The head of the broccoli is 4-7 inches wide

To harvest, use a sharp knife and cut the head of the broccoli off the plant. Cut the broccoli head stem 5 inches or more below the head, then remove the head off with a swift cut. Try to avoid sawing at the stem as this may cause unnecessary damage to the plant and ruin your chances for side harvesting later.
Brussel Sprouts

- **Size:** Heads will be one inch in diameter, about the size of a ping pong ball

- **Shape:** Small and round

- **Color:** Green

- **Harvest:** Usually begins after the first light frost

- **Storage:** Store in a perforated bag in the refrigerator for up to 1 month
Brussel sprouts are 1 inch in diameter

To harvest, remove sprouts by twisting them until they break away from the plant.
Cabbage

- **Size**: Cabbage will be 8-18 inches wide, about the size of a volleyball

- **Shape**: Round, large, heads will be compact and firm

- **Color**: Green or bright purple

- **Storage**: Store in a cold, moist area in a plastic bag for 2-3 months
Cabbage will be double this size, about 8-18 inches across.

To harvest, cut at the lowest point possible, leaving the loose outer leaves attached to the stalk.
Carrots

- **Size:** Tops will be 1 inch in diameter, roots will be 6-9 inches long

- **Shape:** Carrots will be long with a bushy green top. Root will be thick at top and thin out towards the bottom

- **Color:** Bright green tops, carrots will be bright orange

- **Storage:** Store in a cold and moist environment around 33-40 F, store in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator
Carrots are 6-9 inches long

To harvest, loosen the soil with a garden fork then grabbing the foliage just above the top of the carrot, pull it out of the soil.
Cauliflower

- **Size:** 6-8 inches in diameter, about the size of a volleyball

- **Shape:** Round

- **Color:** White with green leaves, orange or light purple

- **Storage:** Store in perforated plastic bags in a refrigerator at 33-40 F for up to 2 weeks
Cauliflower is 6-8 inches in diameter

To harvest, cut the cauliflower head from the main stem but leave a few of the outer leaves attached to help protect the head and prolong its overall quality until ready to eat.
Cucumbers

- **Size**: 3-13 inches long - Pickling cucumbers may be two to six inches long. Slicing cucumbers are best at 6 inches.

- **Shape**: Usually long

- **Color**: Dark green, shiny and smooth

- **Storage**: Cool spot near 45-50 F in perforated plastic bags, storage in refrigerator for 2 days in a plastic bag
Cucumbers are 3-13 inches long

To harvest, use garden shears or pruners to cut the stem ¼ inch above the fruit.
Eggplant

- **Size:** 3-18 inches
- **Shape:** Round, oblong straight and oblong curved
- **Color:** Deep purple, white, light purple, black and green
- **Storage:** Keep in warmest part of refrigerator, 45-50 F, for about 1 week
Eggplant will grow to be 3-18 inches long

To harvest, use a pruners or sharp knife to cut a short piece of stem above the cap attached to the top of the fruit. Wear gloves and long sleeves, as the eggplant stem has prickles, which can irritate the skin. When harvesting eggplants, treat the fruit gently, as it bruises easily.
Green Beans

- **Size:** Beans will be 5-6 inches long and the thickness of a pen

- **Shape:** Long and slender

- **Color:** Bright green

- **Storage:** Store in a cold moist area above 40 F for one week
Green beans are 5-6 inches long

To harvest, snap or cut the pods from the plant, being careful not to tear the plant.
Leaf Lettuce

- **Size:** 6-12 ounces, about the size of a soccer ball

- **Shape:** Head of lettuce will be round, leaves will be long and tender

- **Color:** Bright green, red or purple

- **Storage:** Store in a cool moist area at 33-40 F for up to 2 weeks in a perforated plastic bag
Leaf lettuce leaves will be roughly 8-10 inches long

To harvest, simply cut outer leaves, when the leaves are about 4 inches long, so that the center leaves can continue to grow. New leaves will be ready for harvesting again about two weeks after cutting.
Potatoes

- **Size/Shape:** Will vary by variety

- **Color:** Skins are light brown, red, golden, or light orange; skins are thick, and firmly attached to the flesh of the vegetable

- **Harvest:** When the stalk turns brown and “dies”

- **Storage:** Potatoes should be stored in a cool, dark place between 35-40 F for 6 months
Red potatoes are 2-3 inches across

To harvest, dig potatoes from the soil using a shovel, cultivating tool or pitchfork, using care not to pierce or slice the potatoes.
Yellow and russet potatoes vary in length but will be around 5-7 inches long
Snap Peas

• **Size:** Pea pods will be 3-4 inches long, about the length of a deck of cards

• **Shape:** Pea pods will be long, tender, and plump

• **Color:** Bright green

• **Storage:** Unshelled peas can be kept in a perforated plastic bag in a refrigerator for 1 week
Peas are 3-4 inches long

To harvest, pinch snap peas gently from the vine without tugging. Harvest snap-style green peas when the pods start to fatten, but before peas get too large.
Spinach

- **Size:** 4-5 inches long, leaves will be the size of a golf ball

- **Shape:** Leaves will be tender, slightly round or oval in shape

- **Color:** Dark green, smooth

- **Storage:** Store in a cold and moist area at 33-40 F, store in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator for 2 weeks
Spinach leaves are 4-5 inches long

To harvest, simply cut small spinach leaves at the stem using a scissors. One way to do this is to harvest the outer, older leaves first and then gradually work your way in to the center of the plant as those leaves mature. You can also cut the whole plant off at the base. Harvesting spinach by this method will often allow it to re-sprout and give you another partial harvest.
Summer Squash

- **Size:** Zucchini: 7 inches long, Crookneck and straight neck: 5-6 inches long

- **Shape:** Long and smooth, will be tender and easily punctured

- **Color:** Green or yellow

- **Storage:** Cool spot near 55 F in perforated plastic bags, store in crisper drawer of the refrigerator for one week
Summer squash is 5-7 inches long

To harvest, grab the summer squash by the bulge on the end. Once you have a firm grasp on the squash begin gently lifting it up. You should hear a popping sound which is the fruit snapping off the plant. After you hear the pop, give the squash a quick twist to the left or right, and the squash should be free from the plant.
Sweet Corn

- **Size:** Kernels will be large and plump, the ear of corn will be 8-9 inches long

- **Shape:** The sweet corn will be long and slender

- **Color:** The husk will be dark green and the silk will be brown

- **Storage:** Store in the refrigerator, 33-40 F, for up to one week in a plastic bag
Sweet corn is 8-9 inches long

To harvest, grasp the ear firmly and pull down, then twist and pull. It should come off the stalk easily. Corn is best when harvested early in the morning.
Tomatoes vary in size and shape.

To harvest, grasp the fruit firmly, but gently, and pull from the plant by holding the stem with one hand and the fruit with the other, breaking the stalk just above the calyx that has formed to protect the bud.
Winter Squash

**Hardening process:** After harvesting winter squash, allow it to sit in the sun (in a greenhouse or window) for 2 weeks before storing. This will allow the skin to harden and create a long lasting seal to protect the squash through the winter.

- **Size:** Vary in size by variety, generally long and large, butternut squash are size of football and about 8-12 inches long, acorn squash will be 4-5 inches across.

- **Shape:** Long, round, and smooth, skin will be very hard.

- **Color:** Tan, orange, green and yellow.

- **Harvesting:** Harvest after a light frost – this will help the squash mature and taste sweeter.

- **Storage:** Store in a cool, dark place around 55-60 F through the winter (2-6 months).
Acorn squash is 4-5 inches across

To harvest, carefully cut the squash from the vine, leaving at least a couple inches of the stem attached to help preserve moisture.
Butternut squash is 8-12 inches long

To harvest, carefully cut the fruit from the vine with a sharp knife. Make sure about 2 inches of stem is still attached to the squash.
Questions?

Contact your local office of the NDSU Extension Service.