Lesson eleven: Harvest a Garden Salad Party

“Garden Celebration“ from EATING FROM THE GARDEN, University of Missouri Extension

How do you know when crops are at their peak for flavor and texture? What is the best way to harvest them and keep their flavor? It’s time to harvest cool-season crops and plan a Salad Party. Invite families to enjoy tasting salads from your garden as they hear and see what the children have learned. Play Nutrition and Gardening Jeopardy.

Content objectives:
Apply harvesting, cleaning, and salad mixing strategies for salad crops; Plan and implement a Salad Party

Life Skill objectives:
Critical thinking, Decision making, Communication, Citizenship, Leadership, Healthy living

Core and STEM concepts and skills:
Science Earth and space, Life science
Math Operations and algebraic thinking, Measurement and data
Language Arts Viewing, Speaking, Listening, (depends on what you do for the Salad Party)
Social Studies Behavioral, Economic

Healthy snack: Tossed salads or wraps

Additional and supporting resources:
Present plays, projects, songs, and a tour of the garden during the Salad Party. Plant seeds or transplants for late-summer, early-fall harvest.

Depending on climate and who is taking care of the garden over the summer, salad crops can be planted 30 to 60 days before school starts again so that students can harvest them along with the late summer or fall harvest crops. Extension Master Gardeners are great resources.
BEFORE THE LESSON

1. **Grade 4, Lesson 11:** This document contains all the curriculum items and resources you need for this lesson except for the Jeopardy Game. Those documents are in a separate file. All lesson downloads are located on the [www.peoplesgarden.wsu.edu](http://www.peoplesgarden.wsu.edu) Educational Toolkit.

2. Plan the garden harvesting. Decide if you are inviting parents to the harvest or tasting. Prepare ingredients for harvest tasting. You may not have enough produce from the garden for a tasting. Supplement with purchased products as needed.

3. Set up Nutrition and Gardening Jeopardy.

THE LESSON

1. **Garden Celebration** is a lesson that can be taught over several days. It includes a Jeopardy Game to review nutrition and gardening concepts.

2. **Nutrition and Gardening Jeopardy** can be used with the lesson or at a later date.

AFTER THE LESSON

Complete Garden Journals. Student can record the amount of vegetables harvested, stories about the garden or drawings of the harvested produce.

*Note: If garden will not be tended over the summer, decide how to dispose of rest of produce, clean out garden area, and “put it to bed” until fall.* Divide the class into groups. Have groups assigned to the different jobs (soil prep, spreading compost, incorporating compost, weeding, harvesting, washing). Pull out the rest of the plants and weeds. Cover with leaves and turn into the soil. Rotate students into different jobs.
Harvesting is one of the nicest chores of the season. If you follow a few important, but easy tips, you will get the most of your crops. Some crops (e.g. carrots) only provide one harvest, while other crops (e.g. lettuce) can provide multiple harvests. If possible, harvest early in the morning, after the dew dries, but before the heat of the day.

**LEAFY GREENS – Lettuce & the Brassica Family** *(including Spinach, Kale, Chard, Collards, Asian Greens, Mustards)*

To harvest at peak flavor and freshness, harvest young greens when they are just a few inches long. At this stage all greens are tender and delicious eaten raw in a salad. These are called “baby greens”. Pick the largest, outside, leaves first while leaving the smaller and younger inside leaves for harvesting in a week or two. If possible, eat your greens the same day you pick them. Larger leaves, 6-12” long, are less tender and are best for cooking. Remember that greens cook down; plan about 6 cups of greens for 4 usual servings. Always wash garden greens carefully before eating or cooking to remove dirt and small insects.

*Tip*: Snip (with scissors or skilled fingers) the greens about ½-1” above the base of the plant to encourage new growth. Harvesting this way will allow you to get 3-5 cuttings of lettuce and spinach and even more from kale, chard and other hardier greens.

*Note on Lettuce*: If you planted head lettuce and prefer to harvest an entire head, wait until the entire lettuce plant is about softball - melon size and looks like the shape of head lettuce, as you know it. Don’t wait too long though - Growing head lettuce rather than harvesting baby greens often allows more time for pests and diseases to attack the crop.

**LEGUMES – Peas, Snow Peas, Beans**

Harvest peas with 2 hands, holding the vine with one hand while snipping the entire pod off the vine with your other hand. Harvest when fully mature, about2” long for peas and 4” long for beans, depending on the variety planted. Harvesting encourages new growth, so be sure to pick off over-ripe pods you may have missed earlier on. Continue to harvest from the same vines as the legume ripens.

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**Simple Greens Recipe**

- Wash and dry greens and cut larger leaves into pieces about 3 inches long.
- Heat a bit of olive oil in pan with a clove of chopped garlic or a few tablespoons of chopped onion. Cook 2-3 minutes.
- Add greens and a dash of water. You may keep the greens plain or drizzle with a dash of soy sauce or balsamic vinegar. Cook 3-4 minutes until softened.
- Remove from heat, place into bowl. Sprinkle with slivered almonds, sunflowers seeds and dried cranberries, or chives chopped chives from your garden. Serve cold or warm.
Peas and young beans can be eaten raw, added to salads, or lightly steamed or sautéed.  

**CUCUMBERS & SQUASH (CUCURBIT FAMILY)**

Harvest cucumbers as they ripen to the desired size. For pickling, fruits should be 4 to 5 inches long, for eating fresh; most varieties grow to 7-8 inches long. Cucumbers will develop a bitter taste if they are allowed to over-ripen. (Note: Some varieties such as European or Dutch cucumbers can grow much longer. This is another reason why clear labeling of the plants in the ground is useful.)

To ensure cucumber vines continue to produce heavily all season long, it’s best to harvest daily to prevent them from becoming overgrown.

Even though huge zucchini squash are impressive, they will be more flavorful if they are picked when they are smaller.

*Tip*: Use a sharp knife or pair of scissors when harvesting, and leave a short length of stem on each fruit.

**ROOTS—Carrot, Beets, Radish, Potato**

It can be difficult to determine if root crops are full grown and ready to harvest because they grow underneath the soil. You may recall, most seed packets will tell you how many “Days to Harvest”. This is the number of days it takes from planting to harvesting. If you can keep track of when you planted the seeds (maybe you wrote it down in the garden journal or it’s listed on the label that next to the plant in the ground), you’ll know about when they are ready. That said visual clues are always helpful. Roots start to lift themselves up out of the ground a bit as they develop. You’ll see radishes, beets and carrots creep a bit (<1/4 inch) above the soil giving you a clue about how wide they are getting.

*Tip*: Radishes and beets are easy to pull out of the ground whole. Carrots often break off, leaving half of that sweet orange snack for the worms. To harvest them whole, use a digging fork to loosen the soil around the root and pull it out at the base of the greens. For radishes and beets, grab the plant right at the base of the stem, loosen the root a bit by rocking it back and forth, and then pull. If the whole thing does not come up, gently use a digging fork as you would for carrots.

For potatoes, you can start gently digging for new potatoes once the plants start to bloom. Wash and cook new potatoes immediately, as they do not store well at all. If you are planning to harvest potatoes to store for a while, wait until the tops of the plants start to yellow and die back. Then gently dig around the perimeter of the plant and dig up the tubers. If you are
planning on storing them, don't wash them! Let them sit out in a cool place for a few days to cure, then gently rub off any dirt, and store in a cool, dark place.

**Fruits – Strawberries, Tomatoes, Peppers, Eggplant**

Similar to cucurbits, fruits like to be harvested when ripe and harvesting regularly encourages new production. Use a scissors or be very careful to snip eggplant and peppers from the stem without damaging the fruit. Leaving a small stem on the harvested fruit will help keep it ripe and ensure you don’t bruise it when harvested. Carefully pick tomatoes from the plant. For strawberries, grasp the stem just above the berry between the forefinger and the thumbnail and pull with a slight twisting motion. Carefully place the fruit into your containers.

**Herbs – Basil, parsley, mint, cilantro, oregano, rosemary, tarragon, sage, chives, lavender, thyme & more.**

Herbs are grown for their leaves, flower, roots or seed. Most commonly, culinary herbs are grown for their leaves and should be harvested before they flower. Flowering can cause the foliage to develop a bitter flavor. For example, while chives are quite attractive in bloom – and their flowers are edible and delicious – the stems tend to become tough and woody after bloom. Some general guidelines for harvesting herbs:

- Begin harvesting the herb when the plant has steadily been producing new growth. Harvesting generates the plant to continue to produce. Just be sure to leave enough leaves so the plant can continue to photosynthesize. Don’t be afraid to harvest. Up to 75% of the current season's growth can be harvested at one time!
- Harvest herbs before flowering, otherwise, leaf production declines because the plant will put its energy towards flowering and producing seed to reproduce. *Tip:* Pick off flowers buds as you notice them develop.
- ‘Annual’ herbs (basil, cilantro, chives) will have to be planted each year. They have soft stems and can be harvested until frost. Perennial herbs (rosemary, lavender) have somewhat woody stems and can be clipped until about one month before the frost date.
“Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth”
People’s Garden School Pilot Project

The Extension Partnership including:
Washington State University Extension
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Food Safety Tips for School Gardens

Growing and Harvesting Produce
A school garden provides an opportunity for children and volunteers to learn about how to handle food safely. The following are some food safety tips to follow when growing and harvesting produce.

• Ensure that all persons, including staff, students, and volunteers receive basic food and gardening safety training instructions according to local health regulations. The following topics are recommended:
  • Handwashing and personal hygiene
  • Cleaning and sanitizing garden equipment and containers used to hold produce
  • Handling produce during harvest, washing, and transportation
  • Glove use
• Ensure that volunteers are covered by the school district insurance policy in the event of accident or injury.
• Require signed permission slips for all student gardeners. Permission slips should list potential hazards of working in a school garden and identify any allergies the child may have.
• Do not allow anyone to work in the garden while sick, or until 24 hours after symptoms, such as vomiting or diarrhea, have subsided.
• Ensure that all harvesters wash hands thoroughly in warm, soapy water for at least 10 to 15 seconds, and then rinse with potable water. Ensure that all open cuts or wounds on hands, arms, or legs are properly covered prior to participating in the harvest.
• Require harvesters to wear closed-toed shoes to prevent cuts, stings, or other injuries.
• Consider using single-use disposable gloves when harvesting, or handling, fresh produce as an extra precaution.
• Harvest the garden regularly and remove any rotten produce.
Food Safety Tips for School Gardens, continued

- Use cleaned and sanitized food grade containers, such as plastic bins or buckets, to hold harvested produce. Do not use garbage bags, garbage cans, and any container that originally held chemicals. These types of containers are made from materials that are not intended for food use.
- Clean harvesting tools, such as knives, scissors, etc., with soap and potable water immediately before and after each gardening session.

Using School Garden Produce in your School Meal Program
- Check with your local health department to ensure that local regulations permit food from gardens to be served as part of school meals.
- If the harvest from the school garden will be used in the school meals program, the school garden coordinator should work cooperatively with the school nutrition director to plan and implement the garden.
- Discuss food safety practices in the garden with school garden coordinators. Consider asking gardeners to document their practices. Use the information in this document as a guide to identify appropriate practices.
- Accept produce harvested from school gardens only when school nutrition staff is present to receive it. All produce dropped off or left when staff is not present should not be used in the school meal programs.
- See Best Practices: Handling Fresh Produce in Schools for guidelines on receiving, storage, preparation, and service of fresh produce in schools.
- Reject produce that does not meet school nutrition program standards.
- Receive and inspect produce harvested from school gardens according to the same procedures used to inspect produce from the district’s distributors.
- Do not use any produce that has been noticeably contaminated by animals or insects.
- Refrigerate garden produce immediately, unless the particular item is normally held at room temperature.
- Store, prepare, and serve school garden produce separately from other sources of produce to maintain traceability.
- Document service of school garden produce on the menu management/food production record. See Ensuring Traceability of Fresh Produce for more information.
- Ensure that liability for a potential foodborne illness caused by produce grown in school gardens is covered by your school district.
Eating from the Garden

Grade 4 Unit 5 Lesson 11 People’s Garden School Garden Pilot
Adapted with Permission from University of Missouri Extension

Garden Celebration

Knowledge Objectives:
• Students will review the importance of eating fruits and vegetables
• They will review where the fruits and vegetables are grown the plant and which season to plant them.
• They will recognize when plants are ready for harvest.

Behavioral Objectives:
• Students will choose a wider variety of fruits and vegetables
• They will harvest ripe fresh fruits and vegetables
• They will prepare the garden for fall planting.

Doing the lesson:

Nutrition Activities:

NOTE: You may want to do gardening activities first and do nutrition activities while vegetables are cooking.

1. Explain that today we are going to harvest our garden since we are near the end of school. We will be preparing some of the foods for tasting. Have the students share some of the things they learned this past year about nutrition and gardening.

2. Core Activity: Eating from the Garden Jeopardy
• Divide the students into two groups for a classroom of less than 20 students. Bigger classrooms can have more than two teams. Give each team a bell and instruct them to ring the bell if they know the answer. Each group should work together to come up with a category that they would like to start with. Remind your students that each answer must be given in the form of a question.

Supplies needed:
To Pick or Not to Pick (4-4)
Eating from the Garden Jeopardy game (13-2 or computer version) – SEPARATE FILE
Examples of produce from garden to show maturity
Gardening equipment
Ingredients and equipment for recipe preparation

Core activities:
Eating from the Garden Jeopardy (13-2)
Harvesting
Preparation of garden vegetables

Student handouts:
To Pick or Not to Pick (6-2)

Teacher references:
Vegetable Harvest and Storage-MU Guide
Putting Garden to Bed tip sheet
Eating from the Garden Jeopardy (13-2)

Advance Preparation:
Prepare cards and board for Jeopardy game or download electronic version from Eating from the Garden website: http://missourifamilies.org/eatfromgarden/
Gather materials and garden supplies.
• Have teams roll dice to see which one goes first. The first team chooses a category, and if applicable, an amount. Read the question that they have chosen. Allow them 30 seconds to consult for an answer. They should guess the answer in terms of a question. If they get it correct, they get the points, and if not, the other team gets a chance to "steal" the same amount of points if it guesses the right answer. Keep a tally on the chalkboard of team points.

• If desired, place the “Double Jeopardy” card behind one of the questions and let the team discuss their wager before reading the question to them.

• Allow each team a few minutes to discuss their wagers for "Final Jeopardy." Have them hand in their wagers so that no one can change it later. Give each team a few minutes to discuss their answers to the "Final Jeopardy" question and instruct them to write their answers down. When the time is up, the students share their answers and a winner is determined.

**Gardening Activities:**

**Core Activity: Harvesting**

1. **Discussion:** Do you remember why it is important to know when to harvest produce? We like to grow the biggest sized vegetables but don't want to sacrifice the taste. The quality of vegetables deteriorates when they are left in the garden too long. Vegetables picked too late can be tough, mushy, rotten, or lack taste. Garden produce picked too early lacks flavor or tastes "green" or unripe.

2. What are three important things to remember during harvest to ensure you have great tasting vegetables?
   a. Harvest your produce at the right stage of maturity.
   b. Handle vegetables gently.
   c. Store your vegetables in a cool place soon after harvest.

3. The time for harvesting depends on the climate, the variety, and the vegetable involved. For instance, tomatoes can be left on the vine until fully ripened or harvested when partially mature. They will continue to change color. Other crops such as winter squash and watermelon are not ready for harvest until after they are fully developed on the vine in the garden.

4. What does the phrase "days to maturity" mean and where can you find this for the vegetables you are growing? "Days to maturity" tells how many days it will take from planting the seed until harvest. This number can be found on the back of seed packets, in our *Vegetable Planting Guide*, in gardening books, and seed catalogs. But these numbers should be used only as an estimate of when to harvest because of varying weather conditions. (Show examples)

5. Determining when vegetables have reached peak quality is not easy.
   a. Keep a record of the varieties used and when they were planted.
   b. Know what your fruits and vegetables should look like when they mature. Review *To Pick or Not to Pick* (handout 4-4) and use reference *Vegetable Harvest and Storage-MU Guide*.
c. Look for damage. Some vegetables are more susceptible to damage during harvesting than others, but avoiding bruises and cuts in handling is important with all your vegetables. Never eat any portion of a vegetable that is decayed or rotted.

d. Check your garden frequently during harvest time, for ripe produce. When harvesting, be very gentle with the produce to avoid bruising or damaging it. Many vegetables are very perishable and have a short storage life once they are harvested.

6. Use vegetables harvested from the garden to show examples of ripe, under-ripe and over-ripe vegetables or too large vegetables. Discuss different ways they could prepare the vegetables they grew.

7. There is something else we did after we harvested our vegetables last fall. Do you remember what we did? “Put our garden to bed”. You would not normally put a garden to bed this time of year because most people grow their garden all summer. But school is ending and no one will be tending the garden during the summer, what will happen to it? It will dry out, weeds will grow, insects will attack, produce will grow and no one will pick it. So we need to put our garden to bed this spring so that it will be ready for the new school year. We need to pull out all the plants and weeds. We need to rake up any fallen fruits or vegetables. We can add all these materials to our compost pile (if you have one.) Spread fallen leaves over the garden to a depth of 2 to 3 inches. Turn the leaves into the soil with a spading fork, and smooth the soil out some. Then we have put our “garden to bed.” for the summer and we will ready for next fall’s garden.

8. Core Activity: Preparation of garden vegetables
Go out to garden and harvest enough vegetables that were grown for preparation and point out signs the vegetables are ready to pick. Prepare salad, Skillet Pizzas, Veggie Pillows, or lettuce wraps using julienned or finely chopped fresh vegetables from the garden and others if needed. Eat.

9. Getting the Garden Ready for the Summer
a. Decide what to do with additional produce grown. Options would be prepare them a different way another day, give to cafeteria to use in lunch program, donate to a food bank, etc.

b. **Note:** If garden will not be tended over the summer, decide how to dispose of rest of produce, clean out garden area and “put to bed” until fall. (Use Putting Garden to Bed tip sheet). Pull out the rest of the plants and weeds. Cover with leaves and turn into the soil. Divide the class into groups. Have groups assigned to the different jobs (soil prep, spreading compost, incorporating compost, weeding, harvesting, washing). Rotate students into different jobs.
Eating From the Garden

A nutrition and gardening program

Vegetable Harvest and Storage

Denny Schrock
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Timely harvest and proper storage help maintain the quality and freshness of garden vegetables. This publication gives information on how and when to harvest vegetables, special harvest preparations, storage requirements, and appropriate length and kinds of storage.

The following terms are used in this publication:

- Light freeze: 28 to 32 degrees F
- Moderate freeze: 24 to 28 degrees F
- Severe freeze: Less than 24 degrees F

You should recognize that ideal storage conditions for many vegetables are not attainable around the average home or farm. It is important, therefore, to recognize the limitations of the best storage available.

Refrigerators can be used for storage. If two refrigerators are available, one can be kept at a cold temperature (32 to 40 degrees) and the other at a cool temperature (45 to 50 degrees). If there is only one refrigerator with the control set for normal operation, the temperature in the center storage section is usually between 38 and 42 degrees. Check the setting of the temperature control by placing a thermometer in different places in the refrigerator. Remember: Opening the refrigerator door frequently raises the temperature inside.

Basements are also possible storage places. Temperatures in most heated or air-conditioned basements will usually be 65 degrees or warmer in summer and 60 degrees or cooler in winter. Separate sections can be partitioned to vary the temperature and humidity. You can use outdoor air, dirt floors or wetted sacks to vary the temperature and humidity needs. Unheated basements, if well ventilated, can provide good storage conditions for some vegetables.

Different vegetables require different temperature and humidity levels for proper storage.

Cold, moist storage
32 to 40 degrees F
90 to 95 percent relative humidity

Root crops

- **Beets**
  Begin harvest when beet is 1 inch in diameter or smaller for baby beets. Main harvest is when beets are 2 to 3 inches. Tender tops make excellent greens regardless of the size of the root ball. Harvest spring-planted beets before hot weather. Harvest fall beets before the first moderate freeze. For storage, wash roots, trim tops to \( \frac{1}{3} \) inch, place in perforated plastic bags and store in refrigerator, cold moist cellar or pit. Storage life is two to four months.

- **Carrots**
  Harvest spring carrots before hot weather. Baby carrots may be harvested when roots are 3 inches long. Fall-planted carrots should be harvested before the first moderate freeze. For storage, wash roots, trim tops to \( \frac{1}{3} \) inch, place in perforated plastic bags and store in refrigerator, cold moist cellar or pit. Storage life is two to four months. With a heavy layer of mulch, carrots may also be overwintered outdoors in the ground.

- **Horseradish**
  Harvest after several severe freezes. Store in the ground all winter. Mulch with straw or leaves and dig, when needed.

- **Parsnips**
  Harvest in late fall after several moderate freezes. Exposure to cold develops the sweet flavor. For storage requirements, see carrots.

- **Potato, Irish**
  Harvest in July when the tops have yellowed or died. Do not leave in ground exposed to high temperatures.

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soil temperatures from sun. Wash potatoes and remove the diseased or damaged ones. Cure for about a week in a shaded, well-ventilated place (open barn, shed, garage). Avoid exposing tubers to light. Store in as cool a place as possible at this time of year. You are not likely to find ideal storage conditions (40 degrees, 85 to 90 percent relative humidity) at this time of year other than commercial cold storage. Cool basements are probably the best storage available. Keep humidity high and provide good ventilation. Storage time is two to four months.

• **Radish**
  Harvest when ½ to 1 inch in diameter. Wash roots, trim both taproot, and tops and store in plastic bags in a refrigerator for up to a month. Winter or black radishes are stored the same as carrots.

• **Salsify**
  See parsnips for harvest and storage.

• **Turnip**
  Turnips can be harvested from the time they are 1 inch in diameter. They are best as a fall crop and can withstand several light freezes. Store the same as carrots. Turnip greens may be harvested and used the same as beet greens.

**Cole crops (cabbage group)**

• **Broccoli**
  Harvest terminal head while florets are still tight and have a good green color. Smaller side heads will develop. Store in perforated plastic bags for up to one week in the refrigerator. Freeze any surplus. Best quality will be found in shoots that are harvested during cool weather.

• **Brussels sprouts**
  Harvest the sprouts (small heads) when they are firm — begin from the bottom of the plant. Sprouts can stand several moderate freezes. Harvest all sprouts before the first severe freeze and store in the refrigerator in perforated bags for up to three weeks. Freeze any surplus.

• **Cabbage**
  Harvest when heads are solid. Remove loose outer leaves. Store cabbage in refrigerator, cold cellar or outdoor pit in plastic bags for up to two months.

• **Cauliflower**
  Tie outer leaves above the head when curds are about 1 to 2 inches in diameter (except colored types). Heads will be ready for harvest in about two weeks. Cauliflower may be stored in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Freeze any surplus.

• **Chinese cabbage**
  Grows best in the fall, although varieties that mature in less than 55 days can be planted in early spring. Harvest head after the first moderate frost in the fall and store in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator, cold cellar or outdoor pit. Chinese cabbage will keep for up to two months. Harvest spring cabbage when heads solidify, but before a seed stalk forms.

• **Kohlrabi**
  For standard types, harvest when the swollen stems are 2 to 3 inches in diameter. Stems become woody if left too long before harvest or if grown under poor conditions. Giant, heirloom types may reach 1 foot in diameter and still retain high quality. Cut off root and leaf stems, and store in plastic bags as indicated for carrots. Storage life is two to four weeks.

**Greens**

• **Swiss chard**
  This is a summer green that is harvested continuously. Merely break off the outer leaves. Swiss chard is a beet relative developed for its top. A spring planting will provide greens from early summer to the first moderate freeze. Store in plastic bags up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

• **Collards (kale, mustard, spinach)**
  Harvest the leaves and leaf stems of greens when they reach suitable size. Either harvest the whole plant or the outer, larger leaves. Greens do not store well, but may be kept in plastic bags in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Freeze any surplus.

**Salads**

• **Endive (Escarole)**
  Harvest whole plant. Wash thoroughly to remove soil and sand. Gather leaves together and tie with rubber band. Store in plastic bags in refrigerator for up to three weeks.
• **Lettuce**
  Head, semi-head and leaf lettuce can be stored for up to two weeks in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator. Individual leaves may be harvested at any stage of development before the plants bolt (go to seed). For best quality, successive plantings at two-week intervals are suggested.

• **Parsley**
  Parsley will overwinter if planted in a protected place like a cold frame. If planted in the open, it can be carefully lifted with a ball of soil just before the soil freezes, potted and taken into the house in a cool, sunny room and harvested for several weeks. Parsley leaves will keep in plastic bags in the refrigerator for about one week.

**Legumes**

• **Lima beans**
  Harvest when pods have filled. Harvest tender limas when a bit immature and harvest meaty limas when mature. Shelled limas can be stored in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator for about a week. Surplus limas can be canned or frozen.

• **Garden peas**
  Harvest when pods have filled. Harvest tender peas when a bit immature and harvest meaty peas when mature. Unshelled peas can be kept in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator for about a week. Surplus peas can be kept in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator for about a week. Surplus peas can be canned or frozen.

• **Southern peas (Crowder, Purple Hull, etc.)**
  For fresh use, freezing or canning, harvest when seeds are large and plump, but moist. Either shelled or unshelled peas may be stored in the refrigerator for several days.

**Other vegetables**

• **Asparagus**
  Harvest by snapping 6- to 12-inch spears off at ground level, but before the top begins to fern out. Store in plastic bag in refrigerator for up to one week. Freeze or can any surplus.

• **Onions, green**
  Harvest green onions when they attain sufficient size. Cut off roots and remove top, leaving 1 inch of green. Place in plastic bag and store in refrigerator for up to two weeks.

• **Rhubarb**
  Harvest leaf stalks when ½ to 1 inch in diameter. Do not use leaves. Rhubarb can be stored in perforated plastic bags for up to three weeks in the refrigerator. Surplus rhubarb can be frozen.

• **Sweet corn**
  Harvest sweet corn when kernels are plump and tender. Silks will be dry and kernels filled. To check a few ears for maturity: Open top of ear and press a few kernels with thumbnail. If milky juice exudes, it is ready for harvest. Harvest at peak of quality, husk to conserve space and store in plastic bags for no more than two days in the refrigerator. The new super sweet varieties will store for a week or more. Freeze or can surplus corn. Baby corn may be harvested just as silks emerge, before the ear is 3 inches long.

**Cool, moist storage**

45 to 50 degrees F
80 to 90 percent relative humidity

**Vine crops**

• **Cantaloupe (muskmelon)**
  Harvest when the stem slips easily from the fruit. Lift the melon — if ripe it should separate easily from the vine. Store ripe melons in the refrigerator in a plastic bag for up to 10 days. Try a few boxes of frozen melon balls.

• **Squash, summer**
  Harvest when fruit is young and tender. Skin should be easily penetrated with the thumbnail. Store for up to a week in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator.

• **Cucumber**
  Harvest cucumbers before seeds become half-size. This will vary with variety. Most varieties will be 1½ to 2½ inches in diameter and 5 to 8 inches long. Pickling cucumbers will be a bit more blocky and not as long as slicers. Store slicing cucumbers in the warmest part of the refrigerator (45 to 50 degrees). Place in plastic bag. Storage life is about one week. Pickling cucumbers should be cooled.
quickly in ice water and can be kept up to two
days in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

- **Watermelon**
  Harvest when underside of fruit turns from whit­
  ish to yellowish. The tendril at the juncture of the
  fruit stem and the vine usually dies when the fruit
  is mature. Thumping an immature melon gives
  a ringing metallic sound, while a mature melon
gives a dull thud. Watermelons will store at room
  temperature for about a week and at a tempera­
ture of 45 to 50 degrees for two or three weeks.

**Other vegetables**

- **Eggplant**
  Harvest when fruits are nearly full grown, but
  color is still bright. Eggplants are not adapted to
  long storage. Keep in warmest part of refrigerator
  (45 to 50 degrees) for about a week.

- **Beans, green**
  Bean pods will be most tender when the small
  seed inside is one-fourth normal size. The pods
  become more fibrous as the beans mature. Har­
  vest before pods begin to swell because of the
  developing bean seeds inside. Store green beans
  up to one week in perforated plastic bags in the
  warmest part of the refrigerator. Can or freeze
  surplus.

- **Okra**
  Harvest okra pods when they are 2 to 3 inches
  long. Over-mature pods are woody. Store in plas­
tic bags in the warmest part of the refrigerator for
  about one week. Freeze surplus.

- **Peppers, sweet**
  Harvest when fruits are firm and full size. If red,
yellow or other colored fruits are desired, leave
  on plant until mature color develops. Sweet pep­
  pers can be stored for two to three weeks in the
  warmest part of the refrigerator in plastic bags.

  **Cool, dry storage**
  **32 to 55 degrees F**
  **50 to 60 percent relative humidity**

- **Onions, dry**
  Harvest onions when the tops have fallen over
  and the necks have shiveled. Remove tops, place
  in shallow boxes or mesh bags and cure in open
garage or barn for three to four weeks. Store in
  mesh bags in as cool a place as can be found in
  midsummer (32 to 35 degrees). During humid
  (muggy) weather, keep ventilated.

- **Peppers, hot**
  Pull plants late in the season and hang to dry in
  sun or a warm place. Store in a dry, cool place
  (usually a basement).

  **Warm, dry storage**
  **55 to 60 degrees F**
  **60 to 70 percent relative humidity**

- **Pumpkins, winter squash**
  Harvest pumpkins and winter squash when the
  skin is hard and the colors darken. Both should be
  harvested before frost. Remove the fruit from the
  vine with a portion of the stem attached. Store
  on shelves in a single layer, so air can circulate
  around them.

  **Warm, moist storage**
  **55 to 60 degrees F**
  **80 to 85 percent relative humidity**

- **Sweet potatoes**
  Harvest in fall before frosts and freezing
  temperature. Handle carefully in the digging
  process. Cure for one week at temperature of
  80 to 85 degrees. Ideal storage is at 55 degrees
  and 85 percent relative humidity. (This might
  be accomplished in a basement with ventilated
  boxes covered with periodically moistened burlap
  sacks.)

- **Tomato**
  Ripe tomatoes will keep for a week at 55 to 60
  degrees. Green, mature tomatoes, harvested
  before frost, should be kept at a temperature
  between 55 and 70 degrees. For faster ripening,
  raise temperature to 65 to 70 degrees. Mature
  green tomatoes should approach normal size
  and have a whitish, green skin color. Keep
  mature green tomatoes for three to five weeks
  by wrapping each tomato in newspaper and
  inspecting for ripeness each week. Do not store
  tomatoes in the refrigerator.

This handout is an adapted version of University of Missouri
Horticulture Guide G6226.
### To Pick or Not to Pick

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Harvest these crops when:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Beans**          | • Pods are firm, crisp and not wrinkled.  
• Seeds are not bulging.  
• Snaps when you break the pod in half.                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| **Beets and turnips** | • Roots are at least 1 inch in diameter – up to 2 to 4 inches.  
• Trim tops to ½ inch.  
• Greens may also be harvested while tender.                                                                                                                                                                    |
| **Corn**           | • Ears of corn are well-filled with dark green husks and brown silks.  
• Kernels have milky fluid when punctured with a fingernail.                                                                                                                                                            |
| **Cucumbers**      | • Any stage before they turn yellow.  
• Small cucumbers are generally used for pickles.  
• Larger ones (less than 8 inches) are for slicing.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| **Honeydew/ Cantaloupe** | • Shake the honeydew — you should hear the seeds rattle.  
• Strong cantaloupe smell.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| **Lettuce**        | • Choose leaves at desired size any time before it goes to seed.  
• Snap or cut leaves or harvest whole heads.  
• Leave 2 inches for plant to reproduce.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| **Okra**           | • Pods are 2 to 3 inches long.  
• Okra gets tough and woody quickly.  
• Short hairs on the pods can irritate bare skin.  
• A knife is useful to cut the pods off the plant.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| **Onions**         | • Green onions are ready for harvest at any size.  
• Bulb onions are harvested when the tops fall over and are yellowish.  
• After digging bulb onions, leave them out in the sun to dry for a few days to toughen the skin.                                                                                                                      |
| **Peppers**        | • Any size while they are firm, crisp and unwrinkled.  
• Leave them on the plant to mature and develop a color.  
• Use rubber gloves when harvesting hot peppers to protect skin from irritation.                                                                                                                                     |
| **Radishes**       | • Select ½ to 1 inch in diameter.  
• Trim taproot and tops.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| **Snap peas**      | • Pods are full-size, but peas inside have not swollen.                                                                                                                                                                     |
To Pick or Not to Pick *(continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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| **Summer squash** | - Squash is 6 to 8 inches long.  
- Pick often, as they grow quickly in hot weather.  
- If squash gets too big, it will be tough and seedy, but can be grated for baked breads. |
| **Tomatoes**   | - Fruit are firm with some color.  
- They have the best flavor when they fully develop color on the plant.               |
| **Watermelon** | - Makes a thud sound when you thump it.                                                   |
Putting the Garden to Bed

- After harvesting, remove debris from garden.
- Remember to remove the entire root so plants do not grow back.
- Incorporate compost (if available).