

## Signs that Vegetables Are Ready to Harvest

Once again, as I've learned the hard way many times over, seeing vegetables in the market is one thing; knowing when to pick them is another. This requires daily observation of plant parts, how they are changing and a good reference like the one below, provided once again by the Master Gardener Program sponsored by NM State University and NM Agriculture Extension Service.

I have grown 15 of the 31 crops listed and plan to try 1 or 2 more every year just to tell the difference in taste between home grown and market bought. To pick crops at just the right time is to have a tasting experience you've never had.

### **Be Mindful:**

**It's a great idea to stagger sowing of the same crop by increments that will allow for steady harvest. Beets and radishes are really good examples of this since there is good flexibility in their growing seasons.**

**Don't do what I have done. I went crazy one year and planted something like 15 cucumber seeds all at once. Of course, they were ready to pick.....all at once.**

So my wife asks me for suggestions for that week's menu. I answer, "how about 75 lbs. of cucumbers?" We had gazpacho, cucumber (and beet) salads, learned how to make pickles and you name it. The kids were thrilled too. There is too much of a good thing, so learn to stagger crops through their growing season.

<b>Vegetable</b>	<b>Part Eaten</b>	<b>Too Early</b>	<b>Optimum</b>	<b>Too Late</b>
Lima Beans	Seed	too small	Bright green, seed good size	Pods turned yellow
Asparagus	Stem	Insufficient length 6-8 inches long,	no fiber	Too much woody fiber in stem
Pole Green Beans	Pod and seed	Too small Bean cavity full	seed 1/4 grown Seed large	Pods fibrous
Snap Bush Beans	Pod and seed	Too small Pods turgid	seeds just visible Pods fibrous	seed large
Beets	Root and leaves	Too small Roots 2-3" in diameter	Roots pithy	strong taste
Broccoli	Immature bloom	Too small Bright green color	Head loose	some blooms bloom still tightly closed beginning to show
Brussels Sprouts	Head	Too small, hard	Bright green, tight head	Head loose, color change to harvest to green yellow
Cabbage Head	Head	Insufficient leaf cover	Heads firm, leaf tight	Leaf loose, heads cracked open
Cantaloupes	Fruit	Stem doesn't want to break away easily	Stem easily breaks away	Background color of melon to separate easily from fruit when pulled is yellow; rind soft from fruit
Carrots	Root	Too small	1/2-3/4" at shoulder	Strong taste, oversweet
Cauliflower	Immature bloom	Head not developed	Head compact, fairly smooth	Curds open, separate
Celery	Stems	Stem too small	Plant 12-15" tall, stem	Seed formed, bitter taste medium thick
Collards	Leaf	Leaves too small	Bright green color, small midrib	Midrib large, fibrous
Corn	Sweet Grain	Grain watery, small	Grain plump	Grain starting to dent, liquid in milk stage

				liquid in dough stage
Cucumber	Fruit	Too small	Skin dark green, seeds soft	Skin beginning to yellow, seeds hard
Eggplant	Fruit	Too small	High glossy skin, side springs	Seeds brown, side won't spring back when mashed
Lettuce	Head Leaves	Head not fully formed	Fairly firm, good size	Heads very hard
Okra	Pod	Too small	2- 3" long still tender	Fiber developed, pods tough
Onions	Dry Bulb	Tops all green	Tops yellow	3/4 fallen over bulb rot started
Peas, English	Seed	Peas immature, small to medium and too small to shell	Peas large, sweet, bright green	Pods yellow
Peas, Southern (green)	Seed and pod	Peas immature and too small to shell	Seeds fully developed still soft, pods soft	Seeds hard, pods dry
Pepper, <b>Bell</b> Green	Pod	Too small	Firm and glossy	
Pepper, Chile Green	Pod	Too small	Firm and glossy —	
Potato, Irish	Tuber	Too small	When tops begin to die back	Damaged by freezing weather
Potato, Sweet	Root	Too small	Most roots 2–3" in diameter Early plantings get too large and crack.	Damaged by soil temperature below 50°F.
Rhubarb	Stem	Stem small, immature	Stems 8–15" long are best	Fleshy stem becomes fibrous
Soybeans	Seed	Seeds not developed	Pods thick, bright green	Pods dry, seed shatters out
Squash, Summer	Fruit	Too small	Rind can be penetrated	Rind difficult to penetrate by thumbnail with thumbnail
Squash, Winter	Fruit	Rind soft	Rind difficult to penetrate by thumbnail	Frost damage
Watermelon	Fruit	Flesh green, stem	Melon surface next to ground	Top surface has green and difficult to turn from light straw color to a dull look separate richer yellow
Tomatoes	Fruit		May be harvested in three stages: <b>Mature green</b> —tomato firm, mature, color change from green to light green, no pink color showing on blossom-end. <b>Pink</b> —pink color on blossom-end about the size of a dime. <b>Ripe</b> —tomato full red but still firm.	<b>Green</b> tomatoes will store 1-2 weeks in refrigerator <b>Pink</b> tomatoes will ripen in 3 days at room temperature <b>Ripe</b> tomatoes should be used immediately



