

HAPPY HARVESTIN'

There are a few tricks to make sure you've got a crop that's perfect for picking. When you're out there bringin' in the bounty, follow these guidelines for the best harvests:

Ripe 'n' Ready

How do you know when it's ripe? When you're not sure if something is ready to pick, look for these clues:

Color. Fleshy-fruited veggies, like tomatoes, peppers, and pumpkins, turn color as they ripen. Read your plant descriptions carefully, so you know what color to look for.



Gloss. Healthy veggies are shiny. If their skin is dull, you've waited too long. Watermelon, on the other hand, is the exception to the rule: When it's ripe, the skin is dull.

Size. Lots of crops, including peppers, potatoes, cucumbers, and leafy greens, are prime for pickin' whenever they look like they're the right size. If you're not sure you can trust your eyes, take a bite. One thing's for sure: Your taste buds don't lie.

Tricks of the Trade

- Pick veggies in the morning, because that's when their sugar content is highest.
- Never harvest when plants are wet: You're likely to spread diseases to your healthy plants.
- Work carefully. Bruised or scratched vegetables spoil quickly, and damaged plants are sitting ducks for pests and diseases.
- Use your fingers to pick thin-stemmed vegetables, like peas and beans, and ones that slip easily from the vine, like tomatoes.



- Use a sharp knife or clippers to cut tough- or brittle-stemmed crops. Veggies like cabbage, peppers, broccoli, and squash can be damaged if you pull or tear them from their stems.