Harvesting Vegetables
When Can We Pick?
Pick at the most tasty and nutritious stage.

When is that? Where is that information?

• Seed Packets
• Books and
  Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Publications
• Experience
Seed Packets

- Days to harvest is on the front or back.

- Be sure to record the planting date.

- Time may vary some with weather and care.

![Seed Packet Image]
Books and Extension Publications

• Reference Charts
  Days to harvest
  Length of harvest
• Harvesting Articles
  Days to harvest
  Physical description of the vegetable when ready to be picked
Maturity Rates of Common Vegetables

Vegetable Harvest and Yield

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetable</th>
<th>Days to harvest</th>
<th>Length of harvest</th>
<th>Yield per 100 feet</th>
<th>Planting/person fresh</th>
<th>Planting/person Canned/frozen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cucumber</td>
<td>50-70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>120 lbs.</td>
<td>1-2 hills</td>
<td>3-5 hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okra</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100 lbs.</td>
<td>4-6 ft.</td>
<td>6-10 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer squash</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>150 lbs.</td>
<td>2-3 hills</td>
<td>2-3 hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato</td>
<td>70-90</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100 lbs.</td>
<td>3-5 plants</td>
<td>5-10 plants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpt from Texas Home Vegetable Gardening Guide, Joseph Masbni, AgriLife Communications
Maturity

• Ripe may not be the same to the plant as to the gardener.

• To a plant, the fruit is ripe when the seed is mature.

• To gardeners, the fruit is ripe when it’s at its top quality and ready to be harvested.
Some vegetables should be picked before the seeds mature. 
summer squash, green beans, green peppers, green tomatoes, cucumbers, okra, peas and sweet corn. Storing at room temperature allows ripening to continue.
Some vegetables should be picked when the seeds are mature. 

winter squash, red tomatoes, red peppers

Generally, these should be chilled to slow the life process.
Some vegetables can be picked at several life stages.  
carrots, potatoes, squash, onions

Many baby vegetables taste great.
Knowing the number of days to harvest helps schedule seed starting dates, but many factors influence harvest dates – including soil fertility, precipitation and temperatures. This makes it hard to predict a harvest date.

It’s helpful to know some little clues about when vegetables are ready for picking.
Harvesting Information

Tomatoes

Harvest when fully colored, but firm for eating fresh, cooking and canning. Riper tomatoes may be used for cooking and canning. Green tomatoes can be fried, pickled, and made into relish.

Gently twist the fruit off the plant.
When is a Tomato Really Ripe?

- **GREEN** - Stage 1 tomato is completely light to dark green.
- **BREAKER** - Stage 2 “break” in color from green, to tannish-yellow, pink or red (less than 10%).
- **TURNING** - Stage 3 -10% but not more than 30% shows a change in color.
- **PINK** - Stage 4 - more than 30% but not more than 60% shows pink or red color.
- **LIGHT RED** - Stage 5 - more than 60%, not more than 90%, shows pinkish or red color.
- **RED** - Stage 6 - more than 90% of the surface is red in color.
Cantaloupe

It’s ready when the melon “slips” loose from the vine. It’s good a little before this, too.

The rind shouldn’t have any green color.

Gently pull the melon from the vine.
**Shell Beans** - pinto, butter, lima
Bush-type, 65 - 75 days
Pole-type, 75 - 85 days

**Fresh beans** are picked when the pods become yellowish (or reddish) and beans are plump.
They should pop out easily when you press on the seam.
Leave **dry beans** on the plant until fully dried.
Peppers

Harvest with a sharp knife or clippers. The plants are brittle. May be harvested at any size, but mature have best flavor.

Mature bell peppers are full size (4"-5") and firm. Immature are soft, pliable and thin fleshe.

A green pepper that turns red may be sweeter and higher in vitamin A.
Hot peppers are best when mature and normal mature color.

Mature jalapenos will be about 2”-2½“.

Mature jalapenos that turn red are not hotter.

Peppers will be more pungent in very dry, very hot conditions
Summer Squash

Gently snap squash off the vine. Pick while the skin is tender before seeds mature.
crookneck 4"- 6"     patty pan 3"- 4" diam.
yellow straight neck, zucchini 6" – 8"
None are too small to eat.
Letting squash over-mature on the plant, greatly reduces yield.
Watermelon
There should be a creamy-yellowish ground spot.
The tendril closest to the melon should be brown and withered.
The rind has lost its sheen.
Thumping produces a dull thud, not a ringing metallic sound.
Experience

• Appearance of the vegetable at the store or other gardens

• Ask an experienced gardener

• Contact your local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office
When it’s time to pick, remember

- Avoid damaging the vegetable and the plant
- You may need to harvest daily
- In general, harvest in the early morning
- Over-mature vegetables on the plant reduce yields and quality
- Bigger isn’t always better
Bibliography

- **Texas Gardening-Vegetables**, Dr. Sam Cotner
- **Texas Fruit and Vegetable Gardening**, Greg Grant
- **The Texas Tomato Lover’s Handbook**, William D. Adams
- **Texas Home Vegetable Gardening Guide**, Joseph Masabni
- **Easy Gardening-Harvesting, Handling, Storing Vegetables**, Joseph Masabni

(or go to aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable, look at Guides and Easy Gardening Fact Sheets)