



*How to Harvest Root and
Tuber Vegetables From the*

EDIBLE GARDEN

Ag *for* Life

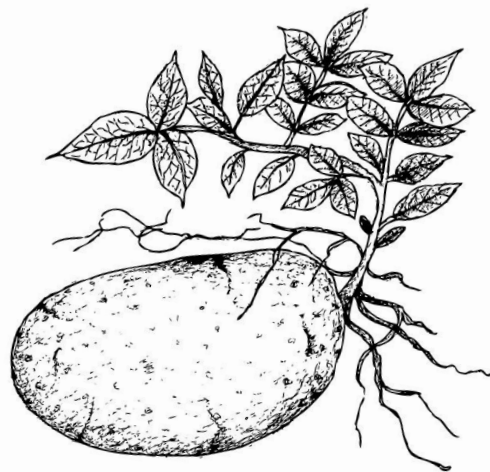
How to Harvest Root and Tuber Vegetables from the Edible Garden



There is nothing better than pulling a fresh carrot out of the garden and munching on it! When harvesting root and tuber vegetables, timing is important. Here are a few tips to obtain your maximum harvest of a few popular edible crops:

In this instruction manual we will learn how to harvest the following vegetables:

- Beets
- Parsnips
- Carrots
- Rutabagas
- Turnips
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Garlic



When and How to Harvest Root and Tuber Vegetables



Before you harvest the roots, you can use the leaves of some root vegetables, such as beets, turnips, and even carrots. As the plants grow through the season, you can cut off some of the leaves to eat. Don't remove all of the leaves - make sure you keep plenty on the plant so that the process of photosynthesis isn't hampered and the plants can keep making sugars. The roots will be larger for it! Use beet leaves in stir fries, or filled with other ingredients such as ground beef or pork and rice in delicious rolls. Turnip leaves may be eaten raw, chopped into fresh salads with other greens, or they can be added to delicious vegetable soups. Carrot tops have a very strong flavour and make a unique pesto to serve with crackers or crudités.

Don't allow the roots of root vegetables to become too large! This may sound silly – isn't the point of gardening to grow everything to its maximum potential? – but most root vegetables will become woody in texture and flavourless if they are left in the ground too long. Harvest them throughout the growing season, while the roots are at various stages of growth – for example, you can take a few baby carrots early in the season (and by harvesting them, the ones left behind will get a bit larger now that they have some extra room to do so). If you plan to pickle, boil, or roast beets, the smaller ones cook up and process much faster than the huge ones.

If you water your plants before harvesting, it's a bit easier to pull out root vegetables. You may wish to use a trowel or a spade to help lift them (just be careful not to nick the roots themselves!)

Beets

Beets are typically harvested when they reach a size of approximately 7.6 centimetres (3 inches) in diameter. Dig them up with a spade or garden fork. Do not leave the greens on before storing them.



Parsnips

This crop is harvested in late fall, and many gardeners often wait until one light frost before lifting parsnips out of the ground. The cold transforms the starches in the root into sugars, yielding a sweeter taste!

Carrots

Depending on the cultivar, carrots are generally harvested when the roots reach a size of 2 centimetres ($\frac{3}{4}$ inches) or more in diameter. Cut the tops off before storing them. Carrots can also handle a light frost before being harvested.

Rutabagas

Harvest rutabagas when they are no larger than 7.6 centimetres (3 inches) in diameter – bigger ones often lose their flavour and appealing texture. Wait until late fall to take rutabagas out of the ground. Like parsnips and carrots, a light frost is beneficial to the taste of the roots.

Turnips

Turnips are usually harvested when the roots are approximately 6 centimetres (2.5 inches) in diameter. Cut the tops off before storing.



Onions



Although onions and garlic are not technically “root” vegetables as they are bulbs, they are usually lumped into this category because the primary plant part that we harvest grows underground. Onions should be harvested when the tops have fallen over and started to dry out. Pulling the bulbs usually dislodges them from the soil with minimal effort.

Potatoes

The part of the potato that we harvest is commonly called a tuber. It is not a root. While you can sneak some baby potato tubers away from the underground stems (called stolons) of the potatoes earlier in the season (usually mid- to late summer), the main crop isn’t harvested until the potato tops die back in autumn. Do not let potato plants freeze before harvesting – the tubers will rot and turn to mush. Remember that even if your potato plants do not produce flowers, they will still form potato tubers. (Some potato varieties do not bloom). Carefully dig potatoes so that you don’t accidentally gouge the tubers. New potatoes have very thin skins and should be cured before they are stored. Lay them in a single layer on top of newspaper in a dark, cool area with excellent ventilation. They need to sit for about two weeks so that the skins harden a bit. Turn them over after about one week.

Garlic

Hardneck garlic, which is planted during the previous autumn, is harvested in late summer (usually around August) of the following year. Hardneck garlic produces flowering stalks called scapes in late June or early July, and these curly stems may be cut from the plants so that the plant’s energy is diverted to plumping up the bulbs. Enjoy eating the scapes in stir fries, salads, and in any dish where you want a mild garlic flavour. To harvest the bulbs themselves, gently pull them up from the ground once the tops have turned brown and died back.



Storage Tips

Be sure to remove all excess soil from your root vegetables before storing them – they will resist rot if they are clean. Do not wash them before storage – wash them before you use them in cooking, instead. Do not trim the tips of the roots off as that will also encourage mould while they are in storage.

Root vegetables such as beets, carrots, parsnips, rutabagas, and turnips can be stored in bins or crates containing damp sand. Pour a layer of sand into the bin and place the vegetables in a single layer on top. Do not crowd the vegetables – it's best if they have some space between them. Put some more sand on top and keep adding layers of vegetables and sand until the bin is full. Sand should comprise the final layer. Store them in a cool location (no warmer than 15.5 degrees Celsius or 60 degrees Fahrenheit). When you want to get vegetables out of the bin, just dig through the sand.

Some root vegetables, such as carrots and beets, can be stored for a long time in the refrigerator. Brush off any soil that may be on the produce, but do not wash it. Place the vegetables in a single layer in a freezer bag. Remove any excess air from the bag, then seal it tightly. Store the bags in the crisper of the fridge and consume the contents within three months. (They may last longer than this, however. Check them periodically to ensure there is no mould growing on them).

To store potatoes, keep them in a cool, dark, dry location. Aim for a temperature of no more than 10 degrees Celsius or 50 degrees Fahrenheit. They store best in containers that allow for air flow – plastic bins with holes in the sides are excellent.

For long-term storage, onions and garlic must be cured. To do this, lay them out in a single layer on wire racks, in a dry, well-ventilated area. They should sit there for about three weeks. Turn them after approximately one week or so. The tops and the necks of the onions and garlic (the part where the tops meet the bulb) should thoroughly dry during this time. After the onions and garlic have cured, you can cut the tops off and discard them. Store them in bins that allow for plenty of air flow, and keep them at a temperature hovering around 4.4 degrees Celsius (40 degrees Fahrenheit) for optimum longevity.





www.agricultureforlife.ca