

# Home Garden Series

## Spring Harvest

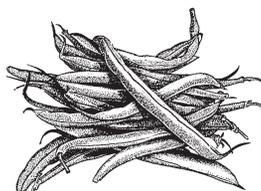


A practical guide to determining when to harvest and how to store produce from your Louisiana spring and summer vegetable gardens

### Snap Beans

**In Season:** Peak season is May through June

**Signals to Harvest:** Pods can be harvested when they are young and tender or fuller. Generally, you don't want the bean to swell and show through the pod. Bean length varies greatly with variety. The more you pick, the more will produce. Use both hands to pick the pod. Be careful not to damage any flowers near the mature pod so you don't lose future bean production.



**Store It:** Wash and allow to dry. Then store loosely in a plastic container in the refrigerator.

### Lima (Butter) Beans

**In Season:** Peak season is June through July.

**Signals to Harvest:** Bean pods should be bright to dark green and feel full. The bulge of the beans should be visible. If pods start to lose their color, they have past their peak time for consumption.

**Store It:** Wash and allow to dry. Then store loosely in a plastic container in the refrigerator.

### Tomatoes

**In Season:** Peak season typically occurs from May through the first frost for spring, summer and fall crops.

**Signals to Harvest:** A tomato should easily pull off the stem when plucked from the vine. Tomatoes are fully ripe when the fruit has ripened evenly to its mature color. Colors include red, pink, orange and yellow. Heirloom

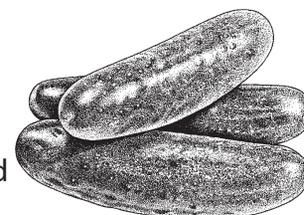


tomatoes will vary in color and often have green shoulders even when fully ripe. If a heavy rainstorm is impending, harvest tomatoes with color to prevent skins from bursting.

**Store It:** Room temperature.

### Cucumbers

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from May through the first frost for spring and fall crops.



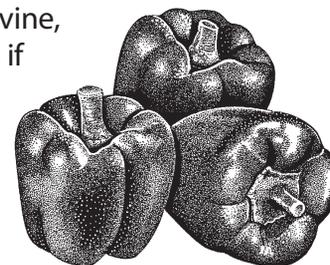
**Signals to Harvest:** Cucumbers should be uniformly ripe and dark green. Depending on variety, cucumbers range from 2 to 12 inches. Most slicers are 6-7.5 inches long and 2 inches wide. European and burpless cucumbers are much longer, ranging up to 12 inches long and usually 1-2 inches wide. Cucumbers that are wider than 2-2.5 inches usually are overripe and bitter. In general, you don't want the seeds to become large. It is best to harvest a bit earlier rather than later, since cucumbers quickly mature on the vine.

**Store It:** In the refrigerator wrapped in plastic.

### Bell Peppers (Sweet)

**In Season:** Peak season occurs from late May through the first frost.

**Signals to Harvest:** Bell peppers should have smooth skin with shiny color. The longer they are left to mature on the vine, the sweeter they get. But if you wait too long they also are susceptible to fungus and insect damage. Bell peppers can be consumed at



any development stage and, depending on variety, range from 2 to 5 inches in diameter and 3 to 7 inches in length.

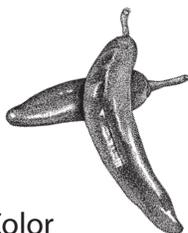
**Store It:** Store in the refrigerator.

## Hot Peppers

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from late June through the first freeze.

**Signals to Harvest:** Harvest when peppers have reached mature color. Color depends on variety but ranges from yellow to red. The longer the pepper is left on the vine, the more pungent it becomes. Harvest according to the pungency you desire.

**Store It:** Store in the refrigerator.

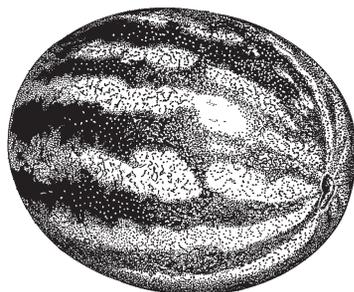


## Watermelons

**In Season:** Peak harvest is from June through July for the spring crop and September through October for the fall crop.

**Signals to Harvest:** A watermelon is ready to be harvested when you flip it over and the belly has changed color from the striped pattern to a white or soft yellow color. If you thump the melon, it should have a hollow sound.

**Store It:** In a dark, dry place.

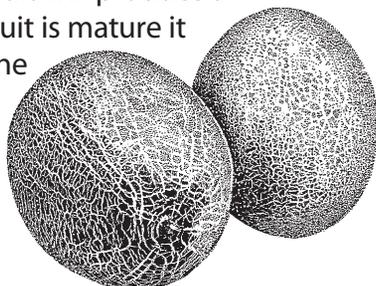


## Cantaloupes

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from late May through June for the spring crop, and the fall crop is harvested from September through October.

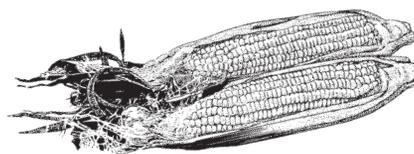
**Signals to Harvest:** The netting should be fully developed on the fruit, with a slight yellow to orange color underneath. The fruit will produce a fragrant aroma. When fruit is mature it will easily detach from the stem end.

**Store It:** Store in a cool, dry location or in refrigerator.



## Sweet Corn

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from June through July.



**Signals to Harvest:** The silks (stringlike hairs) at the top of the ear should be dark brown. Peel back one husk and use your fingernail or a knife to cut into a kernel. Mature sweet corn should excrete a milky substance. If the liquid is clear, the corn is not fully ripe.

**Store It:** Sweet corn should be harvested and immediately put on ice or brought into the house and placed in the refrigerator.

## Eggplants

**In Season:** Peak season is from late June through September.

**Signals to Harvest:** The skin of a mature eggplant will be glossy. Once the shine is lost, the eggplant usually is overripe. Harvest on the immature side when seeds are not fully developed. Most eggplants are ready to harvest when they are 4-5 inches long, but there are varieties that are mature at a silver dollar size and others that are very long and narrow.

**Store It:** Wrap in plastic and keep in the refrigerator.



## Okra

**In Season:** Peak season occurs from June through September. If cut back, okra will be ready to harvest again from September to the first freeze.

**Signals to Harvest:** Tender pods are best for consumption and range from 2.5 to 6 inches long. You should easily be able to pierce into the skin of the pod with your fingernail. Longer pods should be removed from the plant to encourage additional formation of pods. Once production peaks you will need to harvest every other day since pods can become over-mature in a matter of just a day or two.

**Store It:** Store at room temperature or refrigerate for long-term storage.

## Southern Peas

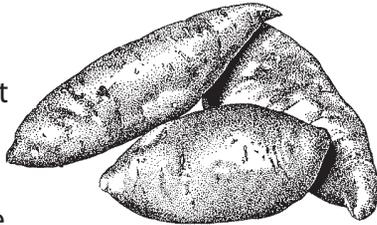
**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from June through September.

**Signals to Harvest:** Pods should be plump. If wrinkled they are past the edible stage. Pod length varies with variety. Pod color depends on variety. For example, purple hull peas turn purple when mature.

**Store It:** Wash, shell and refrigerate immediately.

## Sweet Potatoes

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from August through September.



**Signals to Harvest:** The foliage will turn yellow to brown and start to die. The roots should be firm and plump. They usually are longer and more-narrow than Irish potatoes. Skin color varies depending on variety.

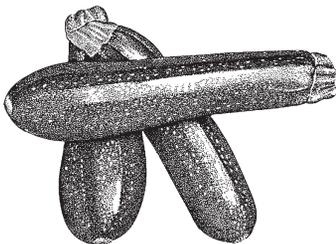
**Store It:** Store in a cool, dark location.

## Summer Squash

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from May through June, with a second crop being harvested from July through September.

**Signals to Harvest:** Summer squash is best when it is still tender. Harvest before fruit reaches 4-5 inches long. The skin should be tender, with a bright shiny appearance. The fruit will feel heavy. Harvest often to increase yields.

**Store It:** Store in the refrigerator.

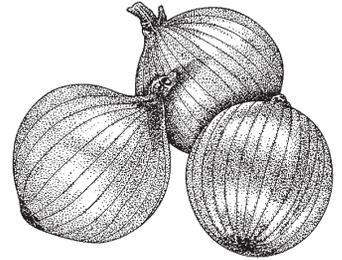


## Onions

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from May through June

**Signals to Harvest:**

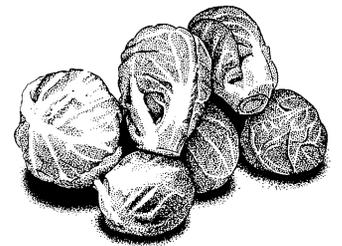
Onions are ready to harvest when half the green onion tops start to turn brown and fall over. Bulbs tend to push up out of the soil, exposing the top 1-2 inches of the bulbs.



**Store It:** Store in a warm, dry place with air movement. Do not wash. Washing will promote rot.

## Brussels Sprouts

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from February through April.



**Signals to Harvest:**

Harvest Brussels sprouts when the heads are firm and 1 to 2 inches in diameter. They should separate easily from the main stem when twisted. The sprouts usually mature from the base of the plant upward.

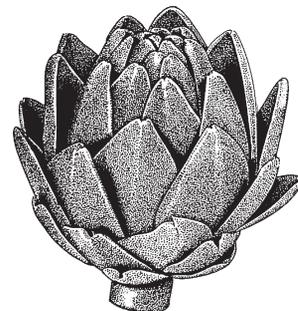
**Store It:** Store in a cool, dry location.

## Artichokes

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from March through July.

**Signals to Harvest:** The plant will send a flower stalk up with the flower bud. Harvest when the bud is 3-4 inches in diameter and tightly closed.

**Store It:** Store in a cool, dark environment.

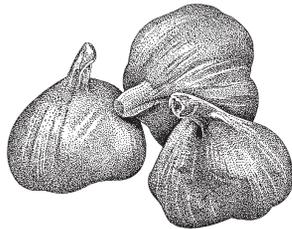


## Garlic

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from May through June.

**Signals to Harvest:** The foliage will turn yellow to brown and start to die back. The wrapper around each bulb should start to dry out. The bulb will be firm and plump. If shriveled, it is past the edible stage.

**Store It:** In a shaded, well-ventilated area until bulbs are completely dry. Then keep at room temperature. Tie a string around the neck and hang it up to help the garlic dry.

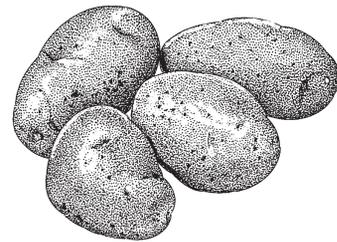


## Potatoes (Irish)

**In Season:** Peak harvest occurs from late April through May.

**Signals to Harvest:** Potatoes begin to develop when you see flowers. These small potatoes may be harvested but generally are smaller than a silver dollar and do not store well. Wait until the foliage begins to turn yellow and brown and die back. Harvest potatoes immediately if this happens and a heavy rain is approaching. Mature potatoes will rot quickly in wet soil. Skin color varies depending on variety, but do not eat Irish potatoes with a greenish tint.

**Store It:** After harvesting, wait two to three days before washing. Store in a cool, dry location.



This publication was made possible by funds from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana.



**BlueCross BlueShield  
of Louisiana**

An independent licensee of the Blue Cross  
and Blue Shield Association.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana incorporated as Louisiana Health Service & Indemnity Company.

# Home Garden Series Spring Harvest

Author:

**Kathryn K. Fontenot**, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist (Horticulture)

**Charles E. Johnson**, Professor (Horticulture)

**School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences**



William B. Richardson, Chancellor and Director  
Louisiana State University Agricultural Center  
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service  
LSU College of Agriculture

Visit our website: [www.LSUAgCenter.com](http://www.LSUAgCenter.com)

Pub. 3360 A 5M 1/15

The LSU AgCenter and LSU provide equal opportunities in programs and employment.