Harvest-to-Table Produce Guide

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A practical companion for turning common garden crops into everyday meals. Use the harvest and storage notes as starting points; variety, maturity, condition, and home storage conditions affect results.

Rinse produce under running water before preparation; do not use soap or bleach. Keep produce separate from raw meat and its juices. See the reference page for authoritative guidance.

Tomatoes

Harvest: Pick at a usable size and the color expected for the variety.

Store: Let mature unripe fruit ripen at room temperature; check often.

Prepare: Cut into wedges for roasting, or chop just before a fresh salad.

Cook and serve: Slice for sandwiches, toss into salads, or cook into a fresh pasta sauce.

Kitchen idea: Match the dish to the fruit: juicy tomatoes suit sauces; firm slices hold their shape on toast.

Summer squash

Harvest: Harvest before skins harden and seeds become large.

Store: Refrigerate for short storage and use promptly.

Prepare: Trim ends; cut similar-sized pieces so they cook evenly.

Cook and serve: Sauté with onion, add to vegetable stews, or roast in thick slices.

Kitchen idea: Cook in batches when sautéing to leave room for browning.

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Produce guide continued

Snap beans

Harvest: Pick tender pods before seeds create obvious bulges.

Store: Refrigerate if you will not cook them soon.

Prepare: Trim stem ends; leave whole or cut into even lengths.

Cook and serve: Steam for a side dish, sauté with garlic, or add to a vegetable soup.

Kitchen idea: Pair with lemon, toasted nuts, or a small amount of butter after cooking.

Leaf lettuce

Harvest: Harvest leaves while they are tender.

Store: Keep refrigerated with moisture retained around the leaves.

Prepare: Rinse under running water unless labeled prewashed; dry before dressing.

Cook and serve: Make a chopped salad, fill sandwiches, or serve beneath a grain salad.

Kitchen idea: Dress the portion you plan to eat and keep the rest separate.

My kitchen notes

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Produce guide continued

Carrots

Harvest: Use variety guidance to judge the desired root size.

Store: Remove leafy tops; keep roots refrigerated with moisture retained.

Prepare: Scrub under running water; trim and peel if desired.

Cook and serve: Roast, grate into salads, or add to soups and braises.

Kitchen idea: Cut thick roots into smaller pieces for more even cooking.

Sweet peppers

Harvest: Pick at the size and color you prefer for the variety.

Store: Use promptly; prolonged cold storage may affect quality.

Prepare: Remove stem, core, and seeds; cut strips or dice for your dish.

Cook and serve: Slice into stir-fries, roast for sandwiches, or dice for beans and rice.

Kitchen idea: Mix ripe and green peppers when you want both sweetness and a sharper vegetable flavor.

My kitchen notes

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Produce guide continued

Cucumbers

Harvest: Choose tender fruit before seeds become coarse.

Store: Refrigerate for short storage; chilling can affect quality.

Prepare: Scrub firm cucumbers under running water; trim and slice.

Cook and serve: Slice for salads, tuck into sandwiches, or stir into a yogurt dressing.

Kitchen idea: Make a fresh cucumber salad when you want crunch without heating the kitchen.

Basil

Harvest: Pick tender leaves.

Store: Stand cut stems in water at room temperature.

Prepare: Rinse leaves before use and handle gently.

Cook and serve: Tear over tomatoes, finish a soup, or stir into freshly cooked pasta.

Kitchen idea: Add a little near the end of cooking, then taste before adding more.

My kitchen notes

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Harvest basket meal planner

Record what came in, decide what to use first, and choose a meal before shopping. Dates on this page are your planning notes, not food-safety limits.

Harvest / shopping date and household

Ingredient	Amount + unit	Use first / storage plan	Meal or use

Three meals I can make from this basket

References and further guidance

Harvest and storage notes: University of Minnesota Extension — https://extension.umn.edu/garden-and-home/yard-and-garden/gardening-in-minnesota/harvesting-and-storing-home-garden-vegetables

Clean, separate, cook, chill: FoodSafety.gov — https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety

Freezing procedures by food: National Center for Home Food Preservation — https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/

Read full, food-specific guidance. This guide provides no canning instructions. Check local Cooperative Extension for growing advice; there are no universal planting dates.

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