

Storing Fall Vegetables

A bountiful harvest may overwhelm you! During summer, freezing and canning vegetables are major activities. In late summer and fall, it's time to harvest the carrots, beets, winter squashes and pumpkins for meals. Good eating depends on proper harvesting and storage.

Harvesting Vegetables

Harvest vegetables when they are at their peak, not immature or overripe. Select vegetables that are free from damage and any insect or disease injury. Harvest them in the morning or let the crops cool outdoors overnight.

Storage Conditions

Proper moisture and ideal temperature are critical in storing vegetables. Without correct conditions, vegetables lose quality, shrivel and become unfit to eat. The goal is to store vegetables for several months after harvest in a cold, moist atmosphere that will not allow them to freeze or decompose. Unheated basements, if well-ventilated and cool, are good for storage. In heated basements, it may be necessary to build a separate section where temperature and humidity can be controlled and ventilated. For gardeners with a large quantity of vegetables, a separate storage building or storage pit may be necessary. For gardeners with a small harvest, a second refrigerator is an excellent storage area.

Storage Conditions for Crops

Your storage will depend upon the crops you wish to harvest and keep for winter meals. Most crops require a cool or cold moist area.

ROOT CROPS Cold, moist storage (32-40 degrees Fahrenheit, 90%-95% humidity).

- **Beets** - Harvest fall beets after several moderate frosts (24-28 degrees Fahrenheit) or mulch with straw and leave in the garden until late fall. For storage, rub off soil, trim tops to 1/2 inch, place in perforated plastic bags or pack in layers separated by moist sand or peat moss in a large box or bin. Store in a refrigerator or a moist, cold cellar or pit.
- **Carrots** - Follow the same harvest and storage requirements as beets.
- **Parsnips** - Harvest in late fall after several moderate freezes. Exposure to cold develops their sweet flavor. Store the same as beets and carrots.
- **Potatoes** - Store in cool area with high humidity and good ventilation. Avoid exposure to light.
- **Turnips** - Harvest from the time turnips are one inch in diameter. Leave in the garden until they have withstood several light freezes or mulch and leave until late fall. Store the same as beets, carrots and parsnips.

COLE CROPS Cold, moist storage (32-40 degrees Fahrenheit, 90%-95% humidity).

- **Broccoli** - Harvest while head is still tight and of good green color. Store in perforated plastic bags for up to one week in the refrigerator. Freeze any surplus.

- **Brussels Sprouts** - Sprouts can stand several modest freezes (24-28 degrees Fahrenheit). Harvest all sprouts before the first severe freeze (below 24 degrees Fahrenheit) and store in the refrigerator in perforated bags for up to three weeks. Freeze any surplus.
- **Cabbage** - Harvest before a moderate freeze. Store in a root cellar in a bin and cover with moist soil. If stored in an outside pit, leave roots and stem on. Place head down and cover with straw or hay, then soil. (Caution: cabbages have one of the strongest odors of all vegetables, so don't store them where the smell will drift through the house.)
- **Cauliflower** - Store in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator for two weeks. Freeze any surplus.
- **Collards, Kale, Spinach** - Wash and store in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Freeze surplus. (Cool, moist 45-50 degrees Fahrenheit, 80%-90% relative humidity.)
- **Sweet Peppers** - Store for two to three weeks in the warmer part of the refrigerator in perforated plastic bags. Cool cellar storage is also possible.
- **Tomatoes** - Harvest before frost. Wrap mature green tomatoes individually in newspaper and store in cellar where temperatures are 55-58 degrees Fahrenheit. Inspect for ripeness weekly. (Warm, moist 55-60 degrees Fahrenheit, 80%-85% relative humidity.)
- **Pumpkins and Winter Squash** - Harvest when the skin is hard and the colors darken. Both pumpkins and winter squash should be harvested before frost and removed from the vine with a portion of the stem attached. Store on shelves in a single layer so that air can circulate around them.