

Saco Community Garden Topics: Harvesting

If you have planted, watered, weeded, thinned and monitored, eventually your garden will grant you flowers and food. Each food plant has its own signs of optimal ripeness. Sometimes, the plant just looks like a food at the grocery store so you know it's time to bring it home. Sometimes you need to nibble a bit to decide if the food tastes ready to harvest.

Many greens like cabbage, chard, and lettuce, can be harvested as microgreens or partially harvested by just taking the outer leaves and letting the center of the plant grow on. Fruits like peppers, tomatoes, melons, squash, etc., will have a full size and shininess to their skins when they are ready. It's a good idea to cut most harvests from the plant instead of tearing them off. Cutting is usually less damaging to the remaining plant that continues to grow on.

When cutting flowers for a vase, have a lukewarm bucket of water to immediately place cut flowers into to preserve their freshness. Most cut flowers are best harvested just before they fully open, but blooms vary.

Check your seed packets or other sources of information about your particular plant for estimated seed to harvest days and instructions on judging ripeness.

One of the saddest things to see at the SCG is a beautifully planted garden that is not harvested. Many healthy food remains in plots to rot or wither while other gardeners walk by controlling their impulses to pilfer. PLEASE don't waste your work by neglecting to harvest your food and flowers! Someone else could have grown food in your plot, so appreciate your blessings and bring home your bounty.

Replanting during the season

Many crops planted at the SCG are short season crops and are done midway through the growing season. Lettuce kicks out about the first week of July and starts to bolt or become bitter. Radishes grow at an alarmingly fast rate. Microgreens go fast, peas are a spring crop, and bush string beans give only a couple of harvests before they are exhausted. These early crops, after harvest and clean out, leave a space in the garden—time to replant! And what to plant? Many gardeners plant a succession of bush beans. The cabbage family of plants like fall weather and those seedlings can go into the garden in mid-summer. In August or even September, a quick planting of lettuce will yield a wonderful crop for the fall season. Your SCG plot is yours until the November deadline, so take advantage of multiple plantings in your garden.

FMI refer to the books in the shed, a wealth of gardening books at the library and bookstore, the Internet and your neighbors in the garden.