

SCG Garden Topic: Saving the Harvest

We are impatient for results from our vegetable gardens, then the food comes all at once and we must act fast to take full advantage of our garden bounty.

Here is an overview of saving your harvest.

A caution: this does not substitute for reputable sources for safe food handling.

1. Harvest at the right time, optimally in the morning when fruit and leaves are plump with moisture.
2. Sort and wash gently, discarding any spoiled veggies.
3. Eat within a couple days to retain optimum nutrition. There are many recipes on the web for every conceivable vegetable. Public libraries and bookstores are also great sources of recipes. And, one of the fun ways to share in the community garden is to swap recipes.

But...if you have too much of a good thing, or want to save food for later, you have choices:

4. Dry storage. Veggies that can be stored in a dark, dry place at room temperature include garlic, onions, potatoes and winter squashes.
5. Freezing. Vegetables that freeze well include broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, eggplant, green beans, peas, peppers, and squash. Most of these are best if first blanched, then dunked in a cold water bath, before putting in freezer-proof Ziploc bags or plastic containers.
6. Canning. Canning allows you to really mix it up with vinegars, herbs and special combinations. In order to avoid harmful bacteria you MUST carefully follow reliable recommendations for quantities (acids and vinegars matter), proper hygiene of your canning jars and equipment, and exact cooking techniques. Relishes, pickles, tomato sauces—after a day with beautiful veggies and your canning kettle you will have a shelf full of vitamin “gems” ready for the winter.
7. Drying. Herbs can be hung upside down inside. Once dry, crumble the leaves and stems into containers that tightly seal. Tomatoes lend themselves beautifully to a slow drying in the oven.

For greater details, check with the county cooperative extension service, Ball© canning at freshpreserving.com, USDA site on food safety, and many preserving books at your library or bookstore. PLEASE use only reliable, reputable sources for safe food handling—don't take chances with your lovely veggies and your health.