

THE EDIBLE GARDEN



August 2014

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GARDEN ACTIVITIES

- Keep on with the weeding and pest control. Removing dead plants and harvesting debris are the best controls for both insects and diseases.
- A late crop of lettuce, peas or radishes can be planted where your garlic was growing.
- Water well before leaving on vacation.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Root cellars were the refrigerators of earlier times. These cool underground places, usually under the kitchen and accessible through a trapdoor, provided storage for fruit, vegetables, smoked meat and fish, preserves, dairy produce and eggs. Temperatures remained even throughout the year.

WHEN TO HARVEST YOUR CROP

*Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark*



You have spent months planting, hoeing and admiring your crop. Everything is thriving but when can you start enjoying your food? Some crops can be eaten as soon as they appear. Have you ever thinned radishes and nibbled on the sprouts? Delicious! The following are guidelines for when to harvest. The next article will provide information on storing produce for winter enjoyment.

- **Beans** are ready when pods swell and the seeds inside are small and tender and do not bulge. Once the beans have flowered you will soon have some ready to eat. If the seeds inside get too large, your beans will be tough. If you want to save seeds for next year's crop, leave some on the plant. Bean plants will produce more beans if you keep the beans picked.
- **Broccoli and Cauliflower** are ready when their crowns stop growing and start to loosen up. Individual florets will get fatter and spread slightly apart. This is the ideal time to harvest. If you miss this critical date and yellow flowers start to appear, harvest and eat your plants.
- **Cabbage** is ready for harvest when the heads are firm all the way through when squeezed. I have also eaten cabbage leaves before they form heads, again when I am thinning plants.
- **Carrots** taste like carrots as soon as they germinate. Pick them at whatever size you prefer. Carrots have a sweeter taste after a frost so there is no rush to dig them.
- **Corn** is ready to be picked as soon as the ears have completely filled out. If the end of the ear is rounded or blunt rather than pointed, the ears are ready. The silks dry up when the ears are almost ready to be picked.
- **Cucumbers (Pickling)** are ready to make dill pickles when they are 7-10 cm. For gherkins and sweet pickles harvest when they are 2-5 cm.

- **Cucumbers (Slicing)** harvest when they are bright dark green and 15-20 cm long. If they get larger they are good for making relish.
- **Garlic** harvest takes place from early July to about the middle of August, depending on the variety. If you lift bulbs too early, they will be undersized and not store well. Too late and they will lack the protective paper-like wrapping around the bulbs. Watch the leaves. The green leaves start to die from the bottom up. When the bottom 3 or 4 leaves are dead and the top 5 or 6 are green, it is time to lift the bulbs. If you are not sure, dig a bulb or two and check. A mature bulb is fully swelled, well sized and has some partially decomposed wrappers. Pick a dry day for harvesting.
- **Herbs** can be harvested as soon as they appear. I often plant extra basil seeds just so I can have that fresh taste sooner. Of course if you pull all your seedlings, you will go through your crop very quickly. Leaf herbs are at their oil and flavour peak once the flower buds appear but before the flowers open. You can certainly use herbs at any time, cutting off what you want and leaving the rest to grow.
- **Lettuce** can be eaten as soon as it is about 5 cm tall. If you are growing leaf lettuce, let it grow larger and pinch off only what you need. It will keep growing. Head lettuce tends to be done when you pick it.
- **Onions** can be used as green onions as soon as they appear. Onions are ready for harvest and storage when the necks are reasonably dry and about 10 days after the tops have fallen over. This is later than garlic, at my house usually sometime in September. Harvest onions when the weather is dry. Harvesting after a rainfall, or when the humidity is high, increases susceptibility to post-harvest disease. At harvest, bulbs must be firm, with mature necks and scales, and must be a good size.
- **Peas** are the tender seeds of pea pods. Pick when they are glossy, plump, rounded pods.
- **Pea Pods** (Snow Peas) should be eaten when they are flat and tender.
- **Peppers** taste like peppers almost as soon as they appear. As they grow their flesh thickens. They start out green and mature to their final colour.
- **Potatoes** can be dug almost as soon as they flower. They will be very small but have that unmatched “new potato” taste. They continue to grow as long as their tops are still green.
- **Summer Squash** is best picked when it is relatively small. Zucchini is best when it is about 15 cm long. The large ones are less tasty. If zucchini gets away from you discard some of the big ones to keep the plants producing.
- **Winter Squash** such as pumpkins and butternut squash take months to mature. Squash develops a hard protective skin over time. If growing for storage, wait until the vines begin to dry and the skins have toughened before harvest. To test for maturity, press a thumbnail against the skin. There should be no visible dent. It is best to harvest squash before frost. If a hard frost is threatened cover the fruits and vines with a blanket or loose straw.
- **Tomatoes** are picked when they are ready to eat. If frost is coming, pick them all. They will ripen indoors.

You have put a lot of effort into your Edible Garden. Now is the time for your reward.

PRESERVING YOUR HARVEST

*Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark*



Preserving food has been a problem for man from earliest times. If he lived in the Arctic, he could freeze it. In the desert, he dried it. Near the ocean, he pickled it in salt water. In 1810, the big breakthrough in preserving food came when a French confectioner named Appert developed a method of preserving food in a bottle. Today, we use all of these methods to preserve our food and reap the true joy of the edible garden. The following techniques will help you save your crops for eating throughout the year:

Drying is the process of removing water from the produce. This can be done by tying several stems together and hanging bunches in a warm, dry, darkish place with good air circulation. A dehydrator or an oven can speed up the process.

Freezing is a fast and easy way to store crops. Freeze on a cookie sheet and once frozen, store in freezer bags. Some crops require blanching prior to freezing. To blanch, bring

water to a boil, add the vegetable to water and boil for 1-2 minutes. Put vegetables in an ice water bath until cold and then into a freezer bag.

Canning is a tried and true method. There are many recipes for canning including those for pickling. Never done home canning before? Do not let that stand in your way. Visit www.bernardin.ca for detailed instructions on how to can.

Cold Storage is a terrific method for storing root vegetables. While most of us are not lucky enough to have a root cellar, we may be able to create a cold space in our basement or garage.

- **Beans** are best frozen. Be sure to blanch them first for 1-2 minutes. Freeze in serving sized bags. Pickled beans are also very popular.
- **Broccoli and Cauliflower** are best frozen. Wash, peel and trim stalks. Cut into pieces no thicker than 3 cm. Blanch for 3 minutes, cool in ice water bath and pack in storage bags.
- **Cabbage** is best preserved as Sauerkraut. Or it can be blanched then frozen. Cut in quarters then blanch for 3 minutes. Store in plastic bags and freeze for use in recipes using cooked cabbage.
- **Carrots** last longest in cold storage. Traditional wisdom tells us to brush off the dirt and store in sand or sawdust. Using a Farmers Market tip from years ago I wash the carrots and store in plastic bags with lots of holes poked in them. Every week or so I open the bags for 1-2 hours and then reseal. I usually have solid carrots until the end of March using this method. Keep the temperature around 5 °C. They can also be frozen or dried but I prefer them fresh.
- **Corn** can be frozen or made into Corn Relish. If freezing, blanch the cobs from 7-9 minutes. It can then be frozen on the cob or you can cut the kernels from the cob and freeze.
- **Cucumbers (Pickling)** are terrific for making Dill or other Pickles or for relish.
- **Cucumbers (Slicing)** are good for relish.
- **Garlic** needs 2 weeks to cure to prepare it for winter storage. Hang it in bundles of 10-12 in an airy, ventilated drying shed. A carport or barn works well for this purpose. Ensure a good airflow and protect from direct sunlight. Once the garlic is cured, trim it to remove stalks, and store. Soft necked garlic can be braided for convenience of storage and use. Best storage temperatures are at low room temperature, 15-22 °C, at low humidity. Never store garlic in the refrigerator as temperatures of 5-10 °C will start premature growth. Different strains and varieties of garlic have different storage lives. In general, hard necked garlic has a shorter storage life than soft necked. If your garlic cloves are separating from the head, use first or use for planting in October.
- **Herbs** such as oregano, thyme and summer savoury dry well hung in bundles in a warm, darkish, dry place with good air circulation. Once they become brittle, remove the leaves from the stem and store the leaves in a dry, airtight jar. They can also be dried in a dehydrator, in the oven or a microwave. Herbs such as basil, tarragon, dill and flat leaf parsley freeze well and result in a taste quite similar to fresh. Strip the leaves, layer them on a baking sheet until frozen and then put in a freezer bag. Herbs are also excellent in a pesto.
- **Lettuce** is not appropriate for storage.
- **Onions** must be dried for a few days in the field, in the sunlight. If frost threatens, cover them overnight. This curing decreases the incidence of neck rot, reduces water loss during storage, prevents microbial infection and is desirable for development of good colour. Store in a cold storage around 5 °C with 65-70 % relative humidity. To ensure a storage life of up to 8 months, onions must be promptly stored after curing. Exposure to light after curing will induce greening of the outer scales. The warmer the storage temperature, the sooner they will start to sprout.
- **Peas** can be shelled and placed in single layer on a cookie sheet then frozen and placed in freezer bags for storage.
- **Pea Pods** (Snow Peas) can be blanched for 1-2 minutes and frozen.
- **Peppers** can be pickled, made into jelly or used in other sauces. They can be frozen in single layers and then bagged but I have not enjoyed the results. Hot peppers can be strung and dried.
- **Potatoes** must be cured before storage. Lay potatoes on a bed of newspapers in a cool dark place. After 2 weeks the skin will thicken and dry. Brush off large clumps of dirt but do not wash. Use damaged potatoes first. Store potatoes in a cool dark room, around 2-4 °C, in baskets between layers of newspaper to keep light from reaching them. Check the potatoes regularly. Remove sprouts or rot to prevent further spoilage.
- **Summer Squash** can be grated, stored in a freezer bag, and frozen. Store in the size appropriate for your recipe.
- **Swiss chard** needs to be washed thoroughly. Put in pot, with no additional water, over medium low heat and “wilt it” for 10-15 minutes until 1/3 the size. Put in serving size bags and freeze.
- **Winter Squash** is cured, unwashed in a warm and sunny spot for a week or two. (Skip the curing step for acorn squash, which can become stringy if it’s not moved to a cool place immediately after harvest.) Take care to protect the fruits from cuts, scrapes, and dents, as all can lead to early spoilage. Winter squashes can last up to 8 months in storage. Store cured squashes in a room that is dry and cool—but no cooler than 18°C—and make sure they have good air circulation. Thinner-skinned types such as acorn, delicata, and spaghetti squashes should be used within a month or

two of harvest. Hubbard and buttercup squashes and pie pumpkins can be stored for up to 4 months.

- **Tomatoes** can be frozen whole, single layer on a baking sheet, and then placed in freezer bags, skin on. When it is time to use them just run hot water over them to remove skins. I prefer to can tomatoes in many different forms - stewed, salsa and tomato sauce to name a few. I use lots of tomatoes and have more storage space than freezer space. Tomatoes can also be dried in a dehydrator (simulating sun dried tomatoes) or roasted in the oven for future storage. If they are not completely dried, they must be frozen to prevent mould, but if dried until "rubbery", they keep a long time in airtight jars.

BOOK REVIEW

*Eydtthe Falconer,
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CITY FARMER – ADVENTURES IN URBAN FOOD GROWING

Lorraine Johnson; Greystone Books, D & M Publishers
Inc – 2014 – August or later
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245 pages

I got off to a slow start with *City Farmer*. Drawn to the book because of my interest in growing edibles in urban settings and by my experiences with Johnson's previous publications I persisted and it became my before-supper reading experience for nearly three weeks. Now my complimentary adjectives include amazing, amusing, amiable and highly instructive.

Johnson has done copious amounts of research in preparing for this book and these are carefully noted in the appendix. No footnotes in the text, though. Her writing style is not academic and the points that she makes and their rationale are presented in the fluent writing style of someone who "walks her talk" and enjoys sharing her urban gardening adventures with her reading public. Her tales are many, they are instructive and they are often very funny!

Today there is a resurgence of interest in growing food locally and for most of us that means finding space in the city because that is where most of us now live. If you think this is impossible in your present circumstances think again. Johnson describes dozens of possibilities many of which she has explored and personally implemented and others that she has seen in operation. You'll be surprised by the number of interesting spaces that can be colonized by enterprising urban gardeners.

Recipe

*Dale Odorizzi,
Master Garden of Lanark*

SPICY SWISS CHARD

1 bunch Swiss chard, washed and patted dry
1-2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
Kosher salt
Cracked black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 325 °F.
2. Remove the chard stems and keep for another use. With a knife, remove the rib from each leaf, chopping each leaf into 3 inch pieces.
3. Place chard in a bowl, drizzle with just enough olive oil to coat the leaves and massage well, ensuring each leaf is coated and slightly glossy.
4. Spread the chard evenly over a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Sprinkle with kosher salt, red pepper flakes and freshly cracked black pepper.
5. Bake for 15 minutes. Then turn the baking sheet 180 degrees and bake for another 5-10 minutes, until the chips are perfectly crisp.
6. Let cool and enjoy.

Watch for **Trowel Talk** the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca/>

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - <http://millstonenews.com/> - for a column by David Hinks of the Ottawa Carleton Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab

The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com)

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