

A top-down view of a large display of fresh produce. The produce is organized into numerous blue plastic crates. The variety includes several types of tomatoes (cherry, grape, and larger varieties), different colors of bell peppers (green, yellow, red), okra (ladyfinger), and red potatoes. The crates are arranged in a grid-like pattern, creating a vibrant and colorful display of farm-fresh vegetables.

Fresh Produce Field to Market

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How do we maintain the freshness of our crops from the field to the market table? Timing, coolness and dryness.

Timing: harvest crops early in the morning, in the evening, or at night.

On cloudy days, unless warm and humid, you can harvest whenever convenient.

Plan your harvest, and decide before you head out what order you will harvest and how much you need.

For CSA or restaurant orders its simple: there is a predetermined amount that you need.

For the market, aim to have minimal crop brought back home - look at last week's sales: if you sold 45 of 50 bunches of carrots then take the same amount or a bit less. If you completely sold out then take 55 bunches or 60.

If you come home with crops store them properly and they may last till the next market, if not eat them.



As soon as you harvest crops, be they greens, summer squash, okra, peppers etc, get them into a cool place.

If possible, take each basket as it is harvested to the shade or coolroom, walk in fridge etc.

Products like microgreens, can be taken in their trays and cut to order or cut ahead of time stored in the refrigerator before market

Or you can grow the micros in 5x5 trays and the customer takes it home and cuts as needed.



Harvesting Greens

Harvest greens, lettuce, chard, kale, collards, etc early in the morning, in the evening, or at night. Think dry and cool.

Avoid harvesting in direct sunlight, give greens an ice bath to remove field heat

Remove as much water from the greens before storage, salad spinner, air dry

Don't harvest frozen greens after a frost. Let the ice melt off first



Harvesting Greens

Start harvesting whatever crop is going to be the easiest and fastest and go from there:

Kale, Collards, Chard, head lettuce, bunch and pack.

Salad mix, arugula, mizuna and other salad greens, wait till the dew is gone before harvesting, cut and bag.

If properly stored and cooled, greens can last for about 5-7 days post harvest.



Root Crops

Root crops are carrots, beets, radishes, turnips, and parsnips

Usually sell better with greens attached, but you may have to cut greens off in the hotter months

Harvest for any crop is the same, cool and dry. Early morning or night is best

Make sure if harvesting right before a market to wash crops, you want a nice display

Wash, bunch, let air dry for a few mins and pack, remember that root crops get heavy quickly, don't pack into large bins

Storage 2-3 weeks

In storage put them in bags or put plastic over the bins so air doesn't blow on them.



Onions/Garlic/leeks

For these crops, dryness is your friend

For green onions or leeks harvest and spray off with hose, for bulb onions I clean as needed

Store in bins in a cool room

For onions with the greens I try to harvest day of sale or the night before to preserve freshness

Onions with tops will last for about a week before the tops look sad, cut tops and sell bulbs.

When onions mature and there tops begin to fall over harvest immediately and if it's going to rain HURRY



Onions/Garlic/leeks

If growing hardneck garlic watch for scapes and pull them out, usually around June. No scapes, bigger bulbs.

When you see the outer leaves of garlic turning yellow begin the harvest.

Green garlic sells well, make sure it is very clean

After harvest let garlic set out in a dry place, high tunnel for a few days to a week

After it is dried, cut the tops/roots off and keep dry and cool

Garlic can store for 6 months





Taters/ S Taters

Harvest when the plants begin to wilt or when you feel they are sized up enough

Harvest when conditions are dry

After harvesting, do not rinse the dirt off

Remove any roots that are rotten

Wash with a hose or a root washer and let air dry



Ginger/Tumeric

Don't store ginger or turmeric in coolrooms, keep at room temperature in boxes or crates let them breath

I usually wait till the first frost or right before. Once the greenery starts to die, harvest

These are easy crops, pull out, wash/ trim, sell



Summer Produce

Summer squash can last about a month after being picked

Harvest and immediately put it into the coolroom

Toms, peps, eggplant, should be harvested cool and dry and immediately stored in the cool room

Okra and toms don't like super cold temps. 40-55 degrees

After a day at the market put the produce back into the cold trailer or coolroom as soon as you can.



Winter squash

Winter squash, cantaloupe, watermelon etc harvest and then let cure 10-14 days 80-90 degrees

Warm temp and good air circulation are a must

Once cured the winter squash will last for months 1-6 months.

Watermelons 2-3 weeks, don't clean them until sale



Edible flowers

Harvest early in the morning or night before, make sure they are dry

Short sale window

Restaurants, individuals love them, high value item, not a lot of labor, good returns

To prolong freshness, put a damp paper towel in the container on the bottom and then put the flowers on top.

Store in fridge in crisper box



Flowers

As with greens, harvest flowers early or late or at night

Put in water immediately

Zinnias or wildflowers do not like to be put in a coolroom

Sunflowers do fine, as do Snapdragons in coolrooms

Strip off any extra greenery when harvesting to save time later

Fresh cut flowers can last a week or more on customers' tables



When at market think about the temperature and if you will be in sun at any point during the market

In cooler weather, greens and other produce do well without water additions

In warmer weather for greens and flowers keep the water handy

Put bunches of greens or lettuce heads in water, keep the rest in the cooler

Spray down greens with water, keep ice in the cooler and keep most of the crop in the cooler

Resources

[Keeping Farm Fresh Veggies and Fruits Fresh](#) University of Connecticut

[Keeping Produce Fresh: Best Practices for Producers](#) University of Pennsylvania

<https://extension.umn.edu/commercial-fruit-growing-guides/harvesting-and-storing-melons-squash-and-pumpkins>

Talk to farmers in your area learn from their first hand experience