

HARVEST/STORAGE OF PRODUCE

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Now is the time to start planning for harvest and storage of vegetables as we get closer to frost. Several things can be done with tomatoes. On frosty nights they can be covered with most anything, but fabrics or blankets offer more insulation value than just tarps. As nights get colder, pulling the plants and piling them and then covering them works. They will ripen in the pile until frozen. When we know that a freeze is coming it works really well to pick all the larger tomatoes. Wrap each one in newspaper and store in the basement in boxes. It also works pretty well to place layers of tomatoes in a box with newspapers in between. This will keep you in tomatoes for several weeks before they begin to rot.

For root crops like carrots, these can go well into winter with just a covering and they can be dug until the ground starts to freeze. Which also means you can plant any of the cool season vegetables now and enjoy them this fall.

You can also use different types of coverings to help keep the frost off of the plants. Generally if we get by two or three nights of frost we can get an extra week or two out of our growing season. You may want to begin planning storage for root crops. They store the best at 33 - 44 degrees. A room off the basement with a dirt floor works well as it must be separate from the central heating system. Wet sacks will help keep humidity high. Also, wet saw dust would work well in this area. But do not add too much moisture as this will cause them to rot. Potatoes should be sorted and remove damaged or diseased ones. Clean them the best you can without bruising. It is well to cure them at 50-55 degrees before storing. Then place them in a dark basement room or cellar and store at a temperature that is near 40 degrees with good ventilation and humidity.

I get asked when is my squash ready to pick? That is a good question. Generally if the squash is a uniform color then it is ripe. I'm sure there are lots of personal ways depending on the variety of squash as to telling if it is ripe. The only sure way is to sample one and see if it is ready to eat. When picking squash make sure to leave an inch or two of the stem so as the fruit won't dry out or start to rot. Winter squash keeps very well in a dry cool space. To prevent mildew on the fruits you can wipe them down with a mild solution of chlorine and water, then you can add some vegetable oil to the outside skin.

We could talk about canning or freezing your produce but that is a topic for a later date and person. If you would like information about canning or freezing we have some good information available at the county Extension office. Remember if you have gone to all the work of raising your garden produce, it is worth taking care

of your harvest. With our short season, this will certainly stretch the length of time for use of the produce.

The fall is a good time to till in organic matter and to give a good tillage of the garden plants. This will start the process of breaking these larger pieces down over the winter and fall tillage helps control weeds.

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture, Sheridan county Office cooperate.