

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

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Handyman Jim Hurley about LED lighting read on Page D4

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Fall forward



An abundance of nutritious fresh vegetables.

Photo Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian

"Delicious Autumn! My soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird, I would fly about the earth seeking the successive Autumns." ~ George Eliot

The sweet smell of the recent rain-dampened soil stimulated my soul. Although it wasn't enough moisture to revive a parched earth, my brown lawn exhibits more strands of green. This short respite from the horrendous heat of the first part of September was a welcome beacon of the cooler forthcoming autumn.

This surprise rainfall was also an indication that it is time to complete harvesting our summer crops before the rainy season begins. Nature has a way of informing us about the optimum time to pluck our favorite vegetable or fruit at its peak of flavor. Berries are plump, juicy, and deep in color. Apples fall into our hands the second they are touched. Our noses lead us to the sweet smell of ripe Asian pears, our eyes shine when we see that perfect deep red tomato, and our ears listen for the hollow thump of a crunchy melon. We use our senses to identify the best time to harvest, including our common sense.

In my garden, because of the heatwave we experienced, many of my fruits are self-harvesting including apples, pears and citrus. (Self-harvesting means that when the fruit is ripe, it automatically falls from the tree.) The challenge with self-harvesting is that the fruit bruises or gets dirt, rocks, or sticks stuck in its flesh. Cut out the blemishes, wash, and eat the rest!

To move forward with fall harvesting, pick your produce early in the morning, just as the sun is rising. The air is cooler, and the crops are crisp, allowing them to last longer. If you wait to pick until the heat of the day, lettuces, radishes, peas, chards, and leafy greens will be limp and wilted. The second-best time to harvest your non-droopy crops like zucchini, grapes, tomatoes, and root vegetables is early evening, preferably after the sun has set. The early sunbathing adds to their sugariness.

Harvesting Hints to help you pick, pull, and pluck a sampling of your garden favorites at the peak of perfection.

Apples: When you touch a ripe apple, regardless of variety, it should need only a slight pull to fall off the branch.

Beans: Pick before the pods begin to swell and when the strings are still slender. Pick often to encourage more bean development.

Beets: Pull when beets are 1 ½ inch to 2 inches in diameter. Cut off the tops to use in cooking or chop them into salads.

Carrots: Whether you are growing orange, purple, yellow, or white carrots, loosen the soil when they are ½-1 inch thick, then pull.

Cucumbers: Harvest cucumbers when they are shiny and small. The bigger they get, the more bitter and seedy they become. Lemon cucumbers will be slightly yellow while English and Armenian cucumbers will be green. Frequent picking encourages more growth.

Pepino Dulce Melons: When you see the pink stripe and the fruit is about 2 inches in diameter, these sweet cucumber/melons are ready to eat.

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