



HOME & GARDEN

Home and Garden information center • 12005 Homewood Road • Ellicott City, MD 21042 • 1-800-342-2507

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Vegetable and Herb Gardening Tips

Culture

- Be sure to discard badly-diseased plants and fruits; don't till them back into the soil. All other plant waste can be composted or directly incorporated into your garden soil.
- Pumpkins and winter squashes can be harvested when they are fully colored and you can't push your fingernail into the rind. Store pumpkins in a cool, dry location with good air circulation. Set them on top of cardboard or wood slats. Be careful not to nick or bruise the fruits.
- Small ornamental gourds can also be harvested now but wait until after the first killing frost to harvest birdhouse, dipper and other large gourds. Leave 2-3 inches of stem for a handle. Let them cure in a well-ventilated, cool dark location. Rub each gourd gently with rubbing alcohol or a weak bleach solution and don't allow them to touch one another.
- Dig potatoes after plants begin to die back. Let them lay on the ground for a few hours before bringing them inside. They should not be washed as this can cause rotting in storage. Store potatoes in a dark, cool location (35°- 40°F.)
- Sweet potato roots will continue to enlarge until frost so check root size to determine when to harvest. Handle harvested roots gently and cure the roots by storing them at 85°F. and high humidity for 4-7 days. Thereafter, your sweet potatoes can be stored in a cool, dry location.
- Carrots can be over-wintered in the garden by covering the bed with a deep straw or leaf mulch. Pull carrots through the winter as needed.
- Reduced sunlight and lower temperatures contribute to a number of physiological tomato fruit disorders including uneven ripening, blotchiness, poor flavor and texture and small size. You may also notice seeds inside of tomato fruits beginning to germinate. This is a natural phenomenon and will not affect eating quality.
- Pick green tomatoes prior to the first frost. They can be slowly ripened indoors by placing them in a paper bag.
- Lettuce, spinach, radishes, and corn salad can be planted through the middle of the month. Cover these late plantings with a cold frame, temporary greenhouse or floating row cover. Be sure to fertilize seedbeds, keep the soil moist and protect seedlings from pests.
- Garlic cloves can be planted through mid-November in deep, fertile soil. Purchase garlic bulbs from a seed catalog. Do not plant store-bought garlic. Divide the planting stock into individual cloves leaving the papery wrappers intact. The largest cloves usually make the largest bulbs. Space the cloves 4 – 6 inches apart with the root end down (pointy end up) and cover with 1-2 inches of soil. Mulch your garlic bed with shredded leaves or compost after the green garlic leaves emerge.
- To improve your garden soil, try sowing a cover crop of annual rye, oats, or winter wheat in a bare area of the garden or in the walkways between crops that will grow until frost. Cover crops protect the soil from erosion, improve soil structure, and recycle soil nutrients when incorporated into the soil in early spring. Seeds should be in close contact with soil to promote germination.

Educating People To Help Themselves

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Herbs

- Dig up small herb plants or divide large ones, pot them up in a soil-less (peat moss and perlite) growing medium and bring them indoors to provide your household with fresh herbs through the winter months. Locate them where they will receive strong direct sunlight or place them under “cool white” fluorescent lights. This is a good time to take cuttings or divisions of perennial herbs to produce additional plants. When taking cuttings, snip off a 4-5 inch length of stem, remove all but the topmost leaves, dip the bottom end in a rooting hormone and insert into a loose potting soil. Keep the cuttings moist until they become rooted, then transplant to larger containers.
- Remove all dead and weak herb plants from the garden. Harvest the individual leaves of tarragon, rosemary, basil, sage and other culinary herbs and dry them indoors. Hang herbs upside down by tying string around the stems and cover with a paper bag to catch ripe seeds and shattered leaves. Hang in a dry location. Store dried herbs in glass jars away from light and heat. Fresh basil can also be frozen in plastic containers.

Have a pest or gardening question? Call the Home and Garden Information Center

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