



## Basic Vegetable Gardening

### Lesson 13: Harvesting Produce

**Lesson Summary:** Members will learn how and when to harvest produce from the garden.

**Intended Learning Outcomes:**

Members will know the signs that produce is ready for harvest.  
Members will use correct methods to harvest produce.

**Length:** 55 minutes

**Materials:**

Notebook or paper for notes  
Club garden records  
Pocket Guide – guidelines on harvesting

**Background:** Harvesting is an important part of Step 5.

- Step 1 – Choosing a site: Where to put your garden
- Step 2 – Preparing a site: Choose your garden design
- Step 3 – Planting the garden
- Step 4 – Tending the garden
- Step 5 – Harvesting, preparing and eating the food

**Lesson Steps:**

**1. (5 minutes) – Introduction**

*Note to trainer/leader: This lesson can be taught whenever a crop is ready for harvesting. It can be repeated as different vegetables are ready for harvesting.*

Tell members that they will learn how to know when produce is ready to harvest, and will learn the right methods for harvesting the produce.

**2. (10 minutes) – Ask members what they know about picking produce.**

Have members think about good vegetables they have eaten and bad vegetables they have eaten. Ask them two questions:

- What does a vegetable taste like when it tastes really good?
- What does a vegetable taste like when it doesn't taste as good?

The difference (besides what vegetables you may or may not like) is usually how ripe the produce is. That is why it is important to pick a fruit or vegetable at its peak. If a vegetable is not ripe yet, or if it is over ripe, then it not only does not taste as good, but it also does not have as many nutrients as a fully ripe piece of fruit or a vegetable.

It is important to pick vegetables at the right time so that they taste good and have a high amount of nutrients.



**3. (5 minutes) Learning how to tell when produce is ready to be picked.**

Sometimes it is very difficult to tell when produce is ready to be picked. Often times you can use size as a guide. Vegetables are ready to be picked when they can be easily removed from the plant. Vegetables should be harvested over several days so that only the ripe ones are picked each time.

Some plants need to be harvested frequently and others need to be harvested only once. Use the information at the end of this lesson, also found in the Pocket Guide, to help your group.

**4. (15 minutes) Walk out to the garden and look at some of the plants.**

Everyone can go to the garden and look at some of the plants that may be ready for harvest. Discuss if they are ready to pick or not. Do some need more time? If possible, select a few different pieces of produce at different stages of ripeness, wash them, cut them up and have the members taste the difference in ripeness. Make sure the members wash their hands first.

**5. (15 minutes) Discuss saving some produce for seeds.**

Before you harvest your plants, it is important to choose produce to save seeds for next year's garden. Saving seeds only works with open-pollinated seeds, meaning plants that self-pollinate or are pollinated naturally by the wind or insects. It does not work with hybrid plants, which are a cross between two different varieties. They may be good plants but they usually produce seeds that are sterile. (Some clubs have planted maize donated by a seed company. These are hybrids and should not be saved.)

Select the best plants and biggest fruits or vegetables to save for seeds. Once you have selected a plant for seeds, be sure to mark it with a stick or other way so that everyone knows not to harvest it for food.

Tomato and cucumber seeds are also easy to save. Collect seeds from the mature fruits and put them in a small amount of water. Then put the seeds in the container with the water in the sun for several days. The fungus that forms on the water will help preserve the seeds and prepare them for new growth. After three or four days, rinse the seeds, dry them, and save them for the next planting.

Although it may not be practical during this lesson to collect all the produce from which you want to save seeds, it is important to discuss the way to save seeds with group members.



## 6. (5 minutes) - Summary and Debrief.

6.1 Gather the members together and discuss today's activities.

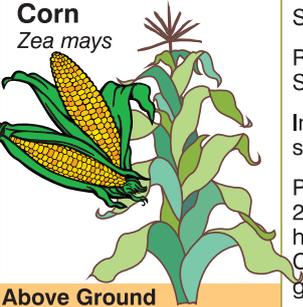
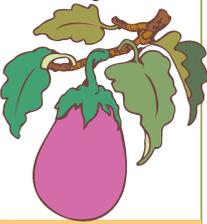
Ask the members the following questions:

- What did we do today?
- How can you tell if a fruit or vegetable is ready to harvest?  
*Answer:* It should usually come off from the plant easily.
- Why is it important to save seeds?  
*Answer:* It is a free way to have seeds for the next planting.
- Can we save hybrid seeds?  
*Answer:* No. The seeds will be sterile and will not reproduce.

## 6.2 (1 minute) - Close

Tell the members when the next meeting will be and what the lesson topic will be. (The lesson on vegetable nutrition follows nicely. That is because proper harvesting influences nutrition.)

Here is an example from the club garden manual or pocket guide of harvest information for garden vegetables.

Common Name & Scientific Name	Root System & Growing Conditions	Days to Harvest & Method	Health Benefits	Comments, Propagation, & Companion Plants
<b>Corn</b> <i>Zea mays</i>  <b>Above Ground</b>	Sun: Full Root Depth: Shallow Important to keep soil moist. Plant no more than 2 seeds in each hole. Cover roots as they grow above soil.	70-90 days Harvest when silk turns brown and ears are full of kernels.	Good source of fiber to aid digestion. Provides potassium to help maintain fluid balance. Provides some energy. Some vitamin B.	Good companion plants: beans and cucumbers.
<b>Eggplant</b> <i>Solanum melongena</i>  <b>Above Ground</b>	Sun: Full Root Depth: Medium Important to keep soil moist. Mulch with pine needles when available.	80-90 days Best to harvest when firm and shiny and before they are too large.	Good source of fiber to aid digestion. Helps body use carbohydrates and proteins. Provides potassium to help maintain fluid balance.	Good companion plants: beans, spinach, and marigolds.