



## May Tips

### VEGETABLES

*Contact: Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture*

- Silver Choice is a new cultivar of white corn that is 15 to 20 percent sweeter and matures two weeks earlier than Silver Queen, according to Today's Garden, August 1993. The ears are 8 inches long, with 16 rows of tender kernels.
- Plant sweet corn and beans every two weeks through June for an extended harvest.
- Tomato cages are an inexpensive way to support your long-stemmed perennials.
- To store seed packets, place them in a small file box labeled with the date they are to be planted. After planting and labeling the plants with variety and date planted, return the empty packets to the file for future reference.
- If you plan to can, plant determinate tomatoes so the fruit will ripen all at once. If you prefer your tomatoes fresh from the vine, plant indeterminate tomatoes so the ripening will be staggered.
- If spraying fruit trees near a vegetable garden, cover the vegetables with a large sheet of plastic to protect them from the spray.
- When it is time to plant lettuce (early spring, about one month before last frost), the climate is also appropriate to plant chives, mint, oregano, parsley, sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon, and thyme.
- To control weeds in a garden: prevent weed seed germination, destroy weeds that sprout before they bear seed, and do not use mulches or compost contaminated with weed seeds.
- Chickweed is full of nutrients and has a nutty flavor when eaten raw. You also can eat it steamed with butter or other flavorings.
- Gourds of different shapes can be used to create animals or birds by sticking legs and heads on them. Try scratching a child's name into the skin when the gourd is half grown. The gourd forms a scab over the scratches, and as it grows, the name grows bigger and bigger.
- When tomato seedlings have five to seven leaves, they are ready to transplant into the garden.
- Successful eggplant development is dependent on a span of temperatures (80 to 90 degrees F) and plenty of water. Water well when the plants are young. Water at least two times a week when temperatures are high and there is no rain.

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- Southern peas require very little fertilization; too much nitrogen encourages vine growth and delay & pod set. When peas are fully formed, harvest ripe pods to encourage continuous production.
- Extend your corn harvest by planting successive crops when the previous crop has three to four leaves, or plant early, mid-, and late-maturing varieties all at the same time.
- Cilantro, the green plant, is sometimes confused with coriander, its seeds. The leafy part has a strong taste distinctive in Spanish and Mexican dishes, and chutney. The seeds have a subtle orange flavor called for in bread, pastry and pickle recipes. Cilantro and coriander are not interchangeable, but cooks may become confused when "fresh coriander" is called for, meaning cilantro.
- Inspect cauliflower every few days. Cut off the curd when the flower sections begin to separate.
- Keep beans and peas well watered to ensure maximum nitrogen fixation. Even mild, water stress can significantly reduce nitrogen fixation. Weight and number of nitrogen-fixing root nodules decrease as water stress increases, and nitrogen fixation ceases completely during extended dry periods.
- Researchers at the Agricultural Research Service have found that many plants respond favorably to specific wavelengths of reflected sunlight. Different-colored mulch materials reflect different wavelengths of light and have produced noticeable results. Tomato harvests increased significantly in both size and quality when plants were grown over red plastic. Potatoes and green peppers produced best when the plastic was white. Commonly, plastic sheeting is available only in black or white, but gardeners may want to experiment with ways to color their plastic mulch.
- To get early germination of okra and cowpea seeds, try increasing seed moisture by placing seeds and dampened vermiculite in plastic bags at room temperature for 3 days before planting in cold soils. Early harvest and increased fresh-pod yield per plant are more likely in plants grown from seed treated this way.
- Hops, a fast-growing, perennial vine, can become a multiple asset in your edible landscape plan. In addition to using the seed pods to flavor beer, poach the flowers and serve them with butter or cream sauce. Tender, spring shoots can be served like asparagus, and trellised hops vines make good screens.
- Another garden use for plastic milk jugs -- seep irrigation. Simply use a large nail to punch holes in the sides of a jug, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Bury the jug, leaving the neck protruding from the soil. Fill the jug with water (solutions of liquid fertilizer may be used to water and fertilize at the same time) and screw the cap on firmly. The water will gradually seep out, providing a slow, deep irrigation for surrounding plants.
- When crops like squash or cucumbers are planted in a circle or hill, place a stick upright in the middle of the circle and leave it there. Later on, you'll know where to water the main roots hidden among the vines.
- Allow more space for pumpkins than for cucumbers or melons. When the desired number of fruit have set, the end of the vine can be pinched off to prevent additional fruit production and encourage large fruit size. Harvest when rind is hard enough so it can't be penetrated with a fingernail.
- To ensure pollination of sweet corn, plant several rows together in a block, rather than in one long row. Side-dress with 3 Tbsp. of 10-10-10 per 10 feet of row when 12 to 18 inches high. Keep well watered, especially from tasseling time to picking. Hill corn plants by pushing a few inches of soil up around the base of the plants when they are fertilized. This provides stability, but takes care not to disturb the roots or remove suckers.

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- Regular sweet com, super-sweet varieties, and popcorn should be isolated from each other by at least 200 feet to prevent cross-pollination.
- Green skin on potatoes means that sunlight is reaching them. To prevent this condition, which causes bitterness and is also toxic, pile more soil over the hills or add a thick mulch of straw.
- From an authority at Peto Seed Company: If you are storing seeds for just a year or two, no special packaging should be necessary if the sum of the temperature (degrees F) plus the relative humidity is always under 100. If the temperature and humidity sum consistently exceeds 100, store seeds in airtight containers with a desiccant to absorb excess moisture. Powdered charcoal, milk powder, and rice are effective desiccants. Dry desiccants at a low oven setting before use.
- Cabbage loopers and imported cabbage worms are green worms that eat large holes in the leaves of plants in the cabbage family. They are difficult to see, but the holes and green "frass" or excrement on the plants are tell-tale signs. For control, caterpillars may be hand-picked or sprayed with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), a natural, non-toxic preparation available by various trade names.
- Slugs love cool, moist weather and succulent, leafy crops, especially lettuce and cabbage. Debris in the garden provides them with a place to hide and should be removed promptly. To see if your garden is under attack, put out a board or invert a flower pot in the garden. The next morning, see if there are any slugs clinging underneath. If so, begin removing them by hand every few days to decrease their population.
- Newly transplanted plants should be protected from cutworms with collars. Cut strips of cardboard 2 inches wide by 8 inches long and staple them into a band which is placed around the plants. Press the collar about 1 inch into the soil.
- Lettuce, tomato, bean, and pea are self-pollinating annual vegetables from which seed can be easily saved. Make sure the plants are open-pollinated (not hybrids) or next year's plants probably will not resemble the parent plants.
- Plan vegetable gardens with nutrition in mind. Compare the nutritional values of your crops with the amount of space allotted them. For example, your family will get more vitamins and minerals from a block of spinach than from an equal amount of lettuce.
- Consider planting some ornamental gourds in the garden this year. After harvest in the fall, wash and dry them thoroughly and paint them with clear shellac. Place the gourds in a basket or bowl, and you'll have an attractive centerpiece for Thanksgiving.
- When thinning beans, watch for 'snake heads', seedlings that have lost one or both of their cotyledons and produce poor weak sprouts, and 'bald heads', seedlings that have the growth point damaged so severely that they can't develop. Both types of seedlings will be weak and delayed in growth and should be removed.
- Stay out of the garden when foliage is wet. Walking through a wet garden spreads disease from one plant to another.
- When planting large-seeded lima or butter bean seed in heavy soils, it may help germination to plant the seed on edge, facilitating the emergence of the large cotyledons, or seed leaves. On light sandy soil, this is of little value because such soil offers little resistance to sprouts.
- Deep transplanting is good for tomatoes. Tomato plants can be set so deeply in the ground that only a little tuft of leaves shows above the surface. Remove all leaves that would be under the soil. New roots will sprout along the stem. Don't try deep transplanting with other vegetables or flowers.
- Drive stakes for future support at the same time you plant tomatoes. If you try to install stakes later, you may damage the plant roots. Tie the plants to the stakes with a soft material such as stockings or worn bed sheets that will not cut into the stems.

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- Trellis and stake downwind from the prevailing winds so plants will lean against the supports when the wind is blowing.
- According to USDA tests, amaranth is an excellent substitute for cooked spinach. It does well in midsummer heat and harvestable leaves are produced in just 30 days from sowing.
- Frequent picking of cucumber, summer squash, bean, pea, lettuce, and greens while they are small and tender will improve the quality of the produce and increase the yield of each plant.
- After planting seed from this year's packets, store leftovers in a tightly sealed jar in the refrigerator. Add a desiccant such as a layer of tissues in which 2 tablespoons of powdered milk have been wrapped to absorb excess moisture from the air.
- Four to five layers of newspaper will serve as an effective mulch in the garden. Cover it with sawdust or straw to reduce the white glare and prevent it from blowing away.
- Flea beetles can severely damage newly set plants. Protect plants with a currently recommended insecticide (check with your local Extension agent) as soon as these small, shiny, black, hopping insects are noted. Floating row covers will prevent flea beetles from damaging plants.
- Spinach leaf miners tunnel between the surfaces of the leaves of beet, spinach, Swiss chard, and lettuce and leave white trails etched in the leaves. The tiny, white grubs hatch from white eggs laid on the underside of the leaf by a small fly. You can prevent the fly from laying eggs on your plants by keeping them covered with a cheesecloth tent or spun polyester row cover. If you cannot cover your plants, consult your Extension agent for recommended insecticidal controls.
- When selecting green leafy vegetables, keep in mind that, generally, the darker green the leaf, the higher the vitamin content. For example, romaine and looseleaf lettuce contain more of vitamins A and C and calcium than either crisphead or butterhead. Fresh spinach contains large amounts of potassium, iron, and vitamin A.
- Don't use a weed-and-feed type fertilizer in the garden. Weed killers don't know a vegetable from a weed. They may injure or contaminate your crops.

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