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How to make the most of your fall harvest

(ARA) – As fall harvest season begins, many gardeners find themselves with bushels of tomatoes, baskets of cucumbers and armfuls of lettuce. So when your garden is overflowing with produce, how do you make the most of your harvest?

Gardeners know that the best way to experience fruit and vegetables at their prime is to grow them in their own backyards or in community gardens. Some of the most popular veggies grown in the United States include tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, onions, beans, lettuce, corn and carrots, while the most popular homegrown fruits include apples, blueberries, strawberries and raspberries.

The experts at ScottsMiracle-Gro offer some top tips to help you take advantage of your fresh produce:

- * Harvest your food the same day you plan on using it. This ensures it will stay fresh and won't dry out or wilt.
- * Do your picking in the morning when fruit and vegetables are most fresh.
- * Once you've picked your produce, store in a cool place and don't wash until you're ready to use it.

How do you know when your produce is ready to be pulled from the ground or plucked from the plant or tree?

- * Tomatoes are ready to pick when they're smooth, heavy, glossy and red or orange.
- * When sweet peppers are between 3 and 4 inches wide and are firm, they're ready to pick. The longer you leave them on the vine, they'll turn red, yellow or orange and become sweeter.
- * When your cucumbers are ready to come out of the garden, they'll be firm and the spikes will easily rub off.
- * When lettuce leaves are young and tender they're ready for a tasty salad.
- * Tasting apples is often the best way to know if they're ready to pick, but you can also grab one and lightly tug. If it easily comes off the branch, there's a good chance it would make a great snack.

One of the biggest challenges for gardeners this time of the year is having too much produce at the same time. In many cases, it's simply too much to eat on your own. So this harvest season, ScottsMiracle-Gro is asking Americans to donate their extra produce to a local Feeding America food bank for their neighbors in need. One in eight people is at risk for hunger and, with record numbers of people turning to food banks, it's more important than ever to contribute fresh, delicious and healthy produce.

To make sure your extra harvest doesn't go to waste, visit [GroGood.com](#) to find and donate to your local Feeding America food bank.

"I believe that everyone should have access to fresh produce and the GroGood campaign allows Americans to enjoy the fruits (and vegetables) of their gardens and share their extra harvest with others," says celebrity cookbook author Katie Lee Joel. Inspired by her mom's vegetable soup, Joel created this recipe for GroGood Garden Vegetable Soup to use produce fresh from the garden.

GroGood Garden Vegetable Soup

Makes eight servings.
Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 1 hour 40 minutes

Ingredients:


- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 medium carrots, chopped
- 2 parsnips, peeled and chopped
- 1 medium turnip, peeled and chopped
- 1 pint Brussels sprouts, trimmed and quartered
- 1 3/4 pounds fresh tomatoes, chopped (can substitute a 28-ounce can of whole tomatoes with juice, chopped)
- 2 quarts chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 1 cup baby lima beans
- One 15-ounce can great Northern or cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Instructions:

Heat the oil in a stock pot over medium heat. Add the onions, celery, and bay leaf and cook until the onions are tender, about 5 minutes. Add the carrots, parsnips, turnip, and Brussels sprouts and continue cooking until the vegetables are just tender, about 5 more minutes. Add the tomatoes and their juices and the stock. Bring the mixture to a boil, reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for 1 hour. Add the beans, salt, and pepper, and simmer for another 30 minutes.

Courtesy of ARAcontent

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