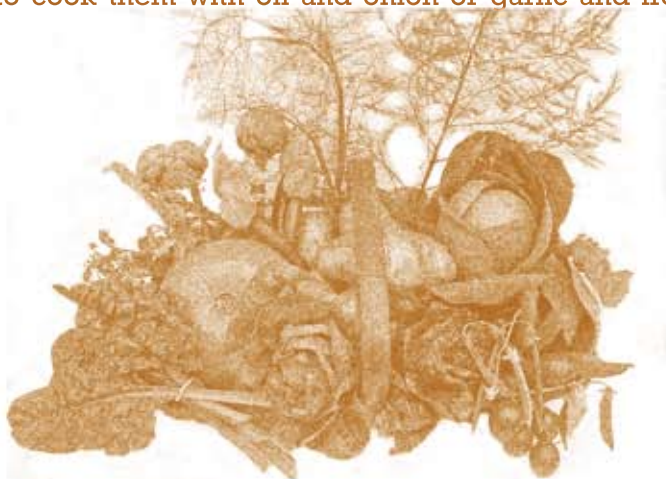


Freezing can be a good way to preserve some garden fruit and vegetables. The stronger the flavour of the produce and the smaller the water content the more successful it is. Strong tasting fruit like currants, gooseberries and raspberries freeze well with no preparation. Plums are best stewed and the stones fished out before freezing. Strawberries can be made into a sauce: liquidise or sieve with sugar and lemon juice to preserve the colour and flavour; excellent with yoghurt or ice cream. Older peas and broad beans can be frozen raw then used in soups and stews. Young podded peas retain much of their flavour when they emerge from the freezer but broad beans can taste a little tinny. Mange-tout peas, French and runner beans all go rubbery after freezing but shelled runner or French beans will freeze and are good in stews or made into falafel or "hummus". With tomatoes and courgettes it is best to cook them with oil and onion or garlic and freeze the sauce.



To see examples of all these techniques and a wide range of organically grown plants visit

the ASK Organic Garden

a half acre garden within Woodside Walled Garden, situated 4 miles north of Jedburgh, east of the A68 on the B6400.

The ASK Organic Garden is open 7 days a week March to October 10am to 5pm. Someone from ASK is usually on hand to answer questions on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays between 11am and 4pm.

Produced for the ASK Organic Garden Club by ASK Organic, Wolfhopelee, Bonchester Bridge, Hawick. TD9 9TP. Telephone 01450 860291 and 860778. email da@askorganic.co.uk.

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HOME GROWN:

the organic way



Harvesting and Storing

Veg and fruit fresh from the garden is always tastiest but some crops store perfectly well, providing you follow a few simple guidelines, allowing you to enjoy your garden produce for many months.



POTATOES ARE A CROP WORTH STORING

How do we know they're ready? You should have finished your First Earlies by the end of July. To enjoy the full flavour, they need to be dug young as much of their wonderful taste is lost as they mature and become more floury. Check how the crop is doing when the first flowers appear: have an exploratory delve into the side of the ridge. Earlies normally take about 12 weeks to mature and make sure you don't grow more than you can harvest fresh from the ground. Second Earlies take 16 weeks from planting and Maincrop about 20 weeks to mature. The shaws or leaf growth will start to die back and the crop should be harvested immediately.

Look out for blight: check that the die back is natural and not a result of blight. This fungus, *Phytophthora infestans*, first burns the leaf edges, you'll see brown black circles on the leaves. Within a few days the leaves will rot away and the infection will spread to the tubers. This disease occurs from about mid July, especially during wet, humid summers. If you see the early signs, cut the shaws to ground level, remove them and leave the potatoes in the ground for a fortnight. It will then be safe to harvest the crop. Check any stored potatoes regularly, about once a month, removing diseased or soft ones.

Lifting potatoes: choose a sunny day, a slight breeze is ideal. You can get special potato forks with broad, flat prongs to reduce damage to the tubers, but carefully used, an ordinary fork will be fine. Pull the shaws out of the ground, picking off the potatoes, then start digging about 45cm from the centre of the ridge, removing all the potatoes, even the 'marbles'. The main clump will be at the centre, beneath the plant's main stems, but they can spread quite widely. Some varieties hug the surface and others grow quite deep down. Fork and re-fork the ground to get them all. You should make a line of harvested potatoes, parallel to the row, and leave them to dry in the sun for a couple of hours. It even pays to turn them to make sure both sides are completely dry.

Storing potatoes: collect the tubers and place them in paper or hessian sacks. The biggest and cleanest ones should go into one sack, with small or damaged ones in another, use these quickly or feed them to the poultry. The sacks of sound tubers should be stored in a dark place, with a low temperature, 2 - 4°C is ideal, and it should be frost-free and rodent proof. Properly stored tatties should last till the following spring.

ONIONS, SHALLOTS AND GARLIC ALSO STORE WELL

The onion family (Alliaceae) need to grow in quite fertile, well watered and weed-free ground for best results. The leaves start to go yellow at the tip before they are ready for harvesting but when the leaves start to die back further the crop is ready.

They should be lifted on a sunny day when they are good and dry to the touch; just gently pull up onions and shallots, garlic will probably need to be carefully levered out with a fork. If you need to harvest them when damp, rig up a line of string in a shed or covered area and put the onions or garlic along the string. Lay shallots on a grill to allow ventilation round them.

Carefully remove all the outer leaves and the roots of the plants so that what is stored is completely clean and healthy. Plait onions and garlic or tie in bunches. Shallots are best stored in a net. A cool, dark, airy place will keep the crop healthy for a long period. Onions that have "thick" necks, ones that snap rather than bend, will not keep long so use these first.

ROOTS – CARROTS, BEETROOT, PARSNIPS

All these crops can be stored but it is quite a lot of work and unless you want to keep them for several months it is a lot easier to leave them in the soil and dig them up as required. They will all stand a bit of frost, ie minus 2 or 3°C at night but beetroot will suffer from prolonged periods of freezing because they sit above the surface. Mice and voles may also eat them if they are left in the ground and slugs will get into any splits.

To store these roots, dig them up when the soil is not wet and claggy so you can easily brush the earth off them. Large carrots and parsnips need cautious digging to make sure you don't spear them. Remove the leaves with a knife, taking care not to cut the root. Select undamaged ones for storage and use imperfect specimens quickly. Have ready a rodent proof box and plenty of damp, not wet, sand or coir. You can use sawdust but ensure it is not "scented" or it will taint the roots. Put a layer of sand in the bottom of the box and lay out rows of roots making sure that they do not touch each other; cover them completely with sand before adding another layer of roots and finish it all off with a layer of sand. Keep in a frost free shed.