

## Horticulture 2009 Newsletter

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### VEGETABLES

#### Squash and Pumpkin Harvest



Summer and winter squash differ in how they grow and in what stage they are harvested. Summer squash tends to grow on compact, bushy plants and produce fruit that is harvested while immature. Zucchini, yellow straightneck or crookneck squash and bush scallop are examples of summer squash. Winter squash such as Butternut, Turban, Acorn, and Hubbard, are produced on large, trailing vines. Pumpkins are also classified as winter squash and share the same basic characteristics. Winter squash are harvested when mature and those that are eaten are peeled. You can tell that a winter squash

(including pumpkins) is mature by using the thumbnail test. Mature fruit will have a hardened rind and will not be easily punctured with a thumbnail.

Pumpkins should be cured by placing them in a warm, dry location for about 10 days. Choose an area where the temperature will not drop below 50 degrees as cold temperatures can shorten storage life. Actually, best curing is achieved at 80 to 85 degrees F and 80 to 85 percent relative humidity without liquid water touching the pumpkins. However, such conditions are difficult for a homeowner to produce, so do the best you can. Butternut, Acorn, Turban, Hubbard and other squash types should be moved directly into storage without curing.

Acorn squash stores best at a temperature of 50 degrees F and 50 to 75 percent relative humidity. However, it has the shortest storage time of 5 to 8 weeks even if these recommendations are followed. These conditions are also best for Butternut and Turban squash as well as pumpkins but these are more stable and will last from 2 to 3 months. Hubbards are the storage kings (5 to 6 months) but prefer a range that is a bit warmer (50 to 55 degrees F) and more humid (70 to 75 percent) than other types. (WU)

# FRUIT

## Storing Apples



You can enjoy apples from January to June with the right conditions. Some apple cultivars can be stored for longer periods than others. Some cultivars will stay in firm, crisp condition for about 6 to 8 months with good storage conditions. The approximate length of time cultivars will keep well under refrigerated conditions are as follows:

Wealthy: 60 days  
Paulared: 90 days  
Gala: 120 days  
Jonathan: 120 days  
Grimes Golden: 120 days  
Golden Delicious: 150 days  
Empire: 150 days  
Delicious: 160 days  
Braeburn: 180 days  
Idared: 200 days  
Rome Beauty: 220 days  
Winesap: 220 days  
Fuji: 240 days  
Granny Smith: 240 days  
Arkansas Black: 240 days

The condition of the apples and how they are stored will strongly influence the storage period.

Some guidelines to help assure good quality and maximum storage life of apples include:

- \* Store only the best quality.
  
- \* Pick as they are first maturing.
- \* Avoid skin breaks, disease or insect damage, and bruises on individual fruit.
- \* Store in a plastic bag to help retain moisture in the apples. The bag should have a few small holes for air exchange. The bags of apples may be stored in boxes to prevent bruising if they must be stacked or moved from time to time.
- \* Refrigerate at about 35 degrees F. An extra refrigerator works well.
- \* Sort about every 30 to 40 days to remove fruit that may be beginning to rot. (WU)

## FLOWERS

### Peonies May Be Cut Back Now



If the foliage of your peonies is spotted and no longer attractive, it may be cut back now. Peonies are essentially dormant by September 1 even though the leaves may still be green. Cut the leaves off close to the ground and compost or discard. (WU)

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Sunflowers – Harvesting and Roasting Seeds



Sunflowers are usually ready to be harvested beginning in mid September and running into October. Though seed heads can be allowed to ripen on the plant, they will need protection from birds. Try covering the heads with a paper sack or cheesecloth once the petals start turning brown. A twist tie or rubber band can be used to secure the covering. This will not only help keep birds out but will prevent ripened seeds from dropping out of the head.

Check for maturity by looking for the following signs:

- Florets in the center of the flower disk (the brown center) should be shriveled.
- Heads should have turned down.
- The backside of the head should be a lemon yellow color.

The ultimate check, of course, is to pull a few seeds to see if they have turned the traditional black with white stripes. Empty shells usually indicate a lack of pollination earlier in the year. If heads are to remain uncovered, harvest when a few seeds start turning the traditional color. The flavor will not be as high as with seed allowed to ripen on the plants but less seed will be lost. Cut the heads and place in a paper sack. Some people prefer to cut the heads with about a foot of stem attached and then hang them upside down in a dry, well ventilated area. A paper bag or cheesecloth can be placed over the heads to prevent seed from dropping during the drying process. Seeds can easily be removed from dry heads with a gentle rubbing action.

## Roasting Seeds

Raw, mature seeds may easily be prepared at home by covering unshelled seeds with salted water (2 qts. of water to 1/4 to 2 cup salt). Bring to a boil and simmer 2 hours or soak in the salt solution overnight. Drain and dry on absorbent paper.

Put sunflower seeds in a shallow pan in a 300 degree F oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until golden brown, stirring occasionally. Take out of the oven and add 1 teaspoon of melted butter or margarine, or cooking oil per 1 cup of seeds. Stir to coat. Put on an absorbent towel. Salt to taste. (WU)

## **Leaching Houseplants**



Everyone knows that someone stranded in the ocean should not drink the salt water. The salt content of that water will make a bad situation worse. What many people don't realize is that this same principle can harm plants.

Fertilizers are salts. They must be salts in order for the plant roots to take them up

However, salt levels can build up over time and eventually may harm plant roots leading to scorched leaves and unhealthy plants. Though this can happen under field conditions, especially in low rainfall areas, it is particularly critical with houseplants.

Houseplants have a certain soil volume that doesn't change until a plant is repotted. Thus salt build-up can be a crucial concern especially if plants are fertilized heavily. Leaching an overabundance of salts can be an important practice to insure the health of our houseplants. Now is a good time to leach while the weather is warm enough that the operation can be done outside.

Leaching is not a complicated or difficult process. It consists of adding enough water to wash out excess salts. How much water is enough? Add the amount of water that would equal twice the volume of the pot. Water must be added slowly so that it doesn't overflow the rim of the pot.

If salt has formed a crust on the surface of the potting mix, remove it but don't take more than 1/4 inch of the underlying media. Replace the removed media with fresh potting mix. (WU)

## **Business Management Articles**

Business management articles are now available to help business owners and managers in the "green industry" with business issues and strategic planning. These articles are designed to address common situations in the workplace and to help businesses be more professional, increase profits and improve working relationships. You can find these articles at <http://www.hfr.ksu.edu/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=597>. Scroll down to find the series titled "Horticulture Business Management Tip Sheets." (EN)

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