



# Earthy Goodness

Expert tips on harvesting root vegetables.

BY LYNN COULTER

**EARTHY POTATOES, ONIONS AND OTHER ROOT CROPS** are great choices for the garden because they're packed with nutrients. Better still, many can be harvested in fall after other vegetables go out of season.

Dell Winegar, who owns Winegar Farms in Fruitland, Idaho, harvests onions for companies like Heinz each August through October. "Timeliness is the most important thing," says Winegar, who uses Massey Ferguson® 8460, 7495 and 7490 tractors. He

notes about any root vegetable: "There's a window of opportunity when you harvest."

Winegar says light frost can increase the sugar content in beets. Other root crops, like carrots, potatoes and parsnips, can also tolerate some frost, although "onions have to be up before a freeze."

To avoid spoilage, don't wash root crops until you're ready to use them, Winegar says. The following are a few more tips Winegar helped us compile.

## How To Harvest: ..... **Beets** ..... **Onions** ..... **Potatoes** .....

Beets can be pulled or dug at any size, although most are at their sweetest and most tender when they're 1½ to 2 inches in circumference. Harvest the green tops anytime, but leave enough leaves for the roots to keep growing.

To store, trim the tops to 2 inches, and keep the roots in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 weeks. For longer storage, use a root cellar or pickle can, or freeze the beets.

You can harvest onions at any size. Try them in slaws or salads when they're small. For bigger onions, wait until the green tops start to fade and flop over. Once most of the tops are down, push down any that remain erect. Let the bulbs mature in the ground for another 10 to 14 days before you pull or dig.

Dry the bulbs in the sun for a day or two to kill the small base roots. To cure them for storage, place the onions in a warm, well-ventilated area out of direct sunlight, and turn them occasionally to help them dry.

The onions are ready when the skins become loose and papery. Hang them in mesh or paper bags in a cool, dry place, or store in a root cellar. Check often and discard any that show signs of spoilage.

For new potatoes, start harvesting when your plants bloom. Dig the small spuds up carefully and use them within a few days. New potatoes don't store well.

For bigger potatoes, wait until the tops start to yellow and die back before you gently lift them out of the ground with a fork or shovel. Shake or rub off any excess dirt, and put the potatoes on top of newspapers in a cool, dark, well-ventilated place until the skins toughen up. Store the spuds in ventilated bins, bushel baskets or cardboard boxes with holes in them. To prevent from sprouting, cover the potatoes with newspaper or cardboard, and move them to a cool, dark place. **FL**

Special thanks to Dell Winegar's dealership, Agri-Service, Inc., in Nyssa, Ore., for their assistance with this story.

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