



Choosing Vegetable Varieties

A large number of vegetable varieties are available to plant in your garden. Read seed catalogs, seed packets, or plant labels to find the ones that will suit you the best. For all kinds of vegetables, look for these key words:

Great flavor, rich flavor

Disease resistant

Vigorous

Dependable

Adaptable to wide range of conditions. (“All American Selection” or “AAS” indicates such adaptability)

High yield

Look for early maturity (early ripening, short season) when choosing tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and melons, particularly in the cooler parts of Sonoma County. Cool nights slow down growth.

For vegetables whose leaves are eaten (lettuce and other salad greens, Swiss chard, spinach, kale, etc.) and for onions, look for slow-bolting varieties.

If you have a small garden or are going to grow in containers, choose compact varieties. These will often be identified as “bush”.

Vegetables may be described as F1, OP or heirloom.

F1 indicates first generation hybrid, a cross between two dissimilar parents. Most modern hybrids have been developed for traits like vigor, disease resistance and/or insect resistance. For hybrids, look also for good flavor. If you are saving seed for next year’s garden, it is important to note that hybrid offspring do not reproduce true to the parents.

OP means open pollinated, a variety produced by a cross but grown for generations so that seeds are stabilized and reproduce true to the parents. Most open pollinated varieties have been selected for flavor. For these varieties, look also for vigor, disease resistance and/or or insect resistance.

Heirloom means an old, open pollinated variety that has been handed down from one generation to another.

On the following pages are the qualities to look for in specific vegetables, some recommended varieties, plus some additional notes on growing (shown in italics). The recommended varieties are not intended to be a complete list of all good varieties. They are simply ones that the contributing Sonoma County Masters liked.

Information about planting each vegetable — when to plant, recommended spacing within and between rows, average days to harvest and some helpful hints — is given in the Sonoma County Master Gardener *Vegetable Planting Summary*. Also see the Master Gardener publication *Growing Vegetables* for general information on planning, preparing, and planting the garden .

Artichokes

Early maturity
Large blossoms
Spineless

Recommended: 'Green Globe'

Taste and size deteriorate in warm weather.

Beans

Crisp texture
String-less (for fresh beans - easiest to prepare)
Recommended: 'Blue Lake' (great tasting, productive, pole green bean), 'Musica' (early, very productive broad bean), 'Jade' (straight, long string less beans, very prolific), 'Detroit Dark Red'

Bush beans are upright plants that do not require support; tend to produce over shorter season

Pole beans require support; tend to produce over longer season

Choose type according to use (some are good more than one way) – fresh whole beans (snap or green beans), fresh shelled, dry shelled

Pods may be green, yellow, or purple

Beets

Sweet, bold flavor
Uniform shape
Smooth skin
Bright colored interior
Greens good for eating

Holds in ground without getting woody

Recommended: 'Bull's Blood', 'Golden', 'Merlin'

May be dark red, yellow, or red and white

Broccoli

Abundant side-shoot production
Tightly domed central head

Recommended: 'Romanesco', 'Di Cicco'

For spring planting choose only early maturing variety

Brussels Sprouts

Good sprout production

For spring planting choose only early maturing variety

Grow in fall/winter for best flavor

Carrots

Strong tops for easier pulling
Performs in heavy soils

Recommended: 'Amarillo' (still delicious when very big), 'Yellowstone', 'Danvers', 'Carson', 'Royal Chantenay'

Shorter lengths are best in heavy soils

Cabbage

Good wrapper leaves

Recommended: 'Derby Day' (really early cabbage, does not bolt, makes fine tight heads), 'Savoy King', 'January King' (fine in shade)

For spring planting choose only early maturing variety

Cauliflower

Consistent performance

Good size and shape

Compact head

For spring planting choose only early maturing variety

Corn

Tolerant to cold soil

SE (sugar enhanced) - best for home gardens

Good husk coverage so ears are less susceptible to corn earworm

For longer harvest, choose early, mid-season, and late varieties and/or succession plant.

Cucumber

Disease resistant - particularly to mildew and bacterial wilt

Bitter free

Burp-less

Recommended: 'Marketmore 76' (prolific; straight, not bitter), 'Lemon'

May have short or long vines - long require support

Eggplant

Early maturity

Lavender and white varieties have more tender flavor

Recommended: 'Hansel', 'Gretel', and 'Fairytale' Hybrid (all long baby eggplants and very early)

Choose type according to use – Japanese types good for stir fry, too tender for Eggplant Parmesan

Kale

Late bolting for spring grown crops

Recommended: 'Red Russian', 'Dwarf Blue'

For spring planting choose only early maturing variety

Grow in fall/winter for best flavor and to avoid aphid problems in spring and summer

Leeks

Slow bolting

Long shanks

Spring/summer types grow well year round in Sonoma County

Because of the shallow roots, rate of growth is largely determined by surface nitrogen, water, and temperature, and weed competition rather than genetic traits.

Lettuce

Slow bolting

Sweet flavor

Heat tolerant for varieties planted in summer; cold tolerant for fall/winter varieties

Recommended: 'Nevada', 'Loma', 'Red Salad Bowl', Romaine 'Little Gem'

Choose leaf variety rather than heading variety to harvest side leaves while leaving enough of the plant to continue growing. Choose upright romaine types for cut and come again growing (cut entire plant about an inch from the crown and allow to grow back).

Melons

Early maturity

Fragrant

Sweet flavor

Juicy

For watermelon, crisp texture

Recommended: Cantaloupe 'Ambrosia'

Varieties that "slip" off the vine easiest to determine when ripe and ready to harvest

Onions

Sweet flavor

Sweet onions won't be sweet if soil has sulphur. Most soil in Sonoma County has some sulphur)

Slow bolting

Bolting has more to do with environmental stress and anything that checks growth than variety

Choose type according to use – green (scallion), bulbing, storage

Long day/short day or day neutral are not critical factors in Sonoma County

Because of the shallow roots, rate of growth is largely determined by surface nitrogen, water, and temperature, and weed competition rather than genetic traits.

Peas

High yielding or double podded varieties

Long season

Disease resistant - particularly to mildew

Recommended: 'Oregon Sugar Pod II', 'Cascadia', 'Sugar Snap' or 'Super Sugar Snap'

May be tall or short – tall require support

Choose type according to use – shelling or edible pod. There are two types of edible pod peas: Snow peas are harvested before the pod is round, while peas undeveloped;. Sugar snap peas should be harvested when the pods are round but still crisp.

Peppers

Early maturity

Leaf coverage to prevent sunburn (good growing conditions enhance the canopy)

Recommended: 'Carmen' (early Italian horn-shaped pepper), 'Italian Sweet' (not quite as early as Carmen but is just as prolific and delicious). 'Red Beauty' (bell), 'Gypsy' (early; can be harvested green, yellow, or red)

May be sweet or hot (mildly to extremely hot), short or tall.

Choose type according to use – thick walls for stuffing, thin walls for drying

Bell peppers tend to sunburn; try other sweet peppers

Potatoes

Recommended: 'Carola', 'Red Gold', 'German Fingerling'

Choose according to use – waxy varieties for boiling, starchy for baking or mashing

For longer harvest, choose early, mid-season, and late varieties

Pumpkins

Recommended: Rouge Vif D'Etampes (make a great Jack O Lantern; has very thick flesh to use in pies)

Choose according to use - jack o lantern or cooking

Consider yield per vine, length of vines

Radishes

Mild flavor

Not pithy even when in soil past maturity date

Recommended: 'French Breakfast', 'Easter Egg'
(mix of colors and sizes)

Spinach

Slow bolting

Upright growth habit

Recommended: 'Bloomsdale Long Standing'

Savoy (rather than smooth) leaf may have better flavor

Swiss Chard

Slow bolting

Tender stems.

Heat tolerant for varieties planted in summer;
cold tolerant for fall/winter varieties

Recommended: 'Bright Lights', 'Erbette' or
'Perpetual Spinach' (both have narrow stems),
Fordhook Giant (green), Pot of Gold (gold),
Rhubarb (red)

The faster the plant grows, the more tender its leaves

*Flavor depends on time of year it is grown –
spring/summer vs fall/winter*

*Leaves taste bitter if plants are stressed from
lack of nutrients, too much heat or too little
water.*

Squash, summer

Tender, flavorful flesh

Recommended: Superpik (yellow) and Black
Beauty (Zucchini)

*Available as bush or vine, open or closed
growth habit.*

*Many types available; familiar ones are
zucchini, crookneck, patty pan*

Squash, winter

Stores well

Recommended: 'Early Butternut', 'Sweet Meat',
'Sweet Mama' or 'Cha Cha Kabocha'

Many types available

*If picked when small and tender, may be
cooked like summer squash*

Consider yield per vine, length of vines

*Dark green varieties prone to cracking -
absorb late summer heat more than other types
as vines are dying back*

Tomatoes

Early maturity

Disease resistant - particularly to Verticillium
wilt, Fusarium wilt, and nematodes, indicated by
the letters "VFN"

Crack resistant

Recommended: 'Early Girl', 'Stupice',
'Hillbilly', 'Sun Gold', 'Snow White Cherry',
'Dona', 'Dr. Wyche's Yellow', 'Super Marzano'
(for sauce or slicing), 'Sweet Million', 'Sweet
100', 'Celebrity', 'Better Boy'

*Determinate tomatoes grow to a certain size,
do not require supports, and generally ripen
all at the same time. Indeterminate tomatoes
continue to grow, require supports, and set
fruit over the course of the season.*

*Choose type according to use –fresh, canning,
paste, drying*

*Available from very small (grape or cherry
tomatoes) to very large and in yellow, orange,
red, green, purple, and combinations of colors
Beefsteak types not recommended for cooler
areas – will ripen later, produce smaller
harvests*

This publication was created by the Sonoma County Master Gardener Food Gardening Specialists.
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