What To Do With Your Harvest

Winter weather is right around the corner. But if you're anything like me, your garden is still bursting with produce. At the tail end of the season, gardeners can sometimes feel

overwhelmed by the amount of produce they have on their hands. Here's what to do with your harvest.

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Before the cold weather sets in, it's a good idea to get almost everything out of the ground and into your house. But what are you supposed to do with your harvest once you've picked it?

Here's how to handle different veggies:

Kale

While kale can survive in cold weather (and actually gets sweeter after frost exposure), you might not want to leave your entire kale harvest outside, especially when hungry critters are desperate for sustenance during the winter months.

I like to leave one or two plants (or more depending on how many I initially planted) to overwinter and go to seed. The rest, I'll harvest and bring inside.

Of course, the best way to make use of your harvest is to share with others. But if you still have some leftover, freezing is the next best thing. You can freeze kale without blanching, which is my preferred way to do it—I'm a lazy gardener, what can I say! Unblanched, frozen kale will last several weeks in the freezer. If you want to keep it longer, blanch it first.

And don't forget to keep some aside for dinner

My favorite recipe for using up kale is one my grandmother used to make often. It's still one of my fave comfort foods. Here's a recipe for Caldo Verde, a Portuguese soup that includes greens, potatoes, and chorizo. If you're vegetarian, leave out the chorizo and add beans.

Carrots

Did you know you can leave carrots in the ground through the winter? The soil acts as a mini-refrigerator and keeps them fresh. But if you live somewhere with frigid winters (like me), you're probably better off harvesting them since a hard freeze makes it tough to pull out these tasty root veggies.

Carrots keep for a while if properly stored in the fridge, so I don't usually bother freezing them—though, you can if you blanch them. Just make sure to remove the green tops since these wilt and spoil much faster than the root portion.

Onions

Properly cured onions will last all winter long in storage. Just make sure you have a cool dark place to put them in.

Salad greens

Some lettuces can be left alone to deal with winter weather. With a little bit of protection, you can keep harvesting from your lettuce plants for a while. Delicate, summer lettuces and greens need to be removed before a hard freeze, though.

The key to keeping lettuce longer in the fridge is to store it unwashed in a plastic bag with a teaspoon of water to maintain humid conditions.

But I don't follow the rules. I prefer to prep my lettuce before storing it. I'll wash, dry, and cut it, so it's ready to go when I'm preparing dinner. If it's already ready for me to use, I'm much less inclined to let it go to waste or put off using it until another day.

How do you store your harvest? Do you keep a winter garden and harvest things outdoors year-round? Tell me about it in the comments!