



## *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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