



## 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 contributing Sonoma County Master Gardeners liked.

Information about planting each vegetable—when to plant, recommended spacing within and between rows, average days to maturity, and some helpful hints—is given in *Year-Round Food Gardening in Sonoma County* (organized by planting windows) and in *Vegetable Planting Summary* (alphabetized by crop). Also see *Growing Vegetables* for general information on planning, preparing, and planting the garden.

## Artichokes

Early maturity, large blossoms, spineless

**Recommended:** ‘Green Globe,’ ‘Emerald,’ ‘Imperial Star’

*Prefers mild winter; 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), ‘Fortex’ (snap pole bean), ‘Musica’ (early, very productive broad bean), ‘Jade’ (straight, long string-less beans, very prolific), ‘Provider’ (early, good yields in adverse conditions)

*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 can be prepared 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,’ ‘Detroit Dark Red,’ ‘Ruby Queen’

*May be dark red, yellow, or red and white*

## Broccoli

Abundant side-shoot production, tightly domed central head

**Recommended:** ‘Romanesco,’ ‘De Cicco,’ ‘Umpqua,’ ‘Nutribud,’ ‘Green Comet’

*For spring planting, choose only early maturing variety*

## Brussels Sprouts

Good sprout production

**Recommended:** ‘Jade Cross,’ ‘Long Island Improved’

*For spring planting, choose only early maturing variety*

*Grow in fall/winter for best flavor*

## Cabbage

Good wrapper leaves

**Recommended:** ‘Derby Day’ (really early cabbage, does not bolt, makes fine tight heads), ‘Savoy King,’ ‘January King’ (fine in light shade), ‘Copenhagen Market’

*For spring planting, choose only early maturing variety*

## Carrots

Strong tops for easier pulling, performs in heavy soils

**Recommended:** ‘Amarillo’ (still delicious when very big), ‘Yellowstone,’ ‘Danvers,’ ‘Royal Chantenay’

*Shorter lengths are best in heavy soils*

## Cauliflower

Consistent performance, good size and shape, compact head

**Recommended:** ‘Snow King’

*For spring planting, choose only early maturing variety*

## Corn

Tolerant to cold soil, SE (sugar enhanced sweet corn)—best for home gardens, good husk coverage so ears are less susceptible to corn earworm

**Recommended:** ‘Silver Queen’ (sweet), ‘Early Xtra Sweet’ (sweet), ‘Who Gets Kissed’ (sweet), ‘Golden Bantam’ (sweet), ‘Cascade Ruby Gold’ (flint), ‘Painted Mountain’ (flint), ‘Dakota Black’ (pop)

*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, not bitter), 'Lemon,' 'Sweet Success,' 'Liberty' (pickling), 'Addis Pickle'  
*May have short or long vines—long requires support*

## Eggplant

Early maturity, lavender and white varieties have tenderer flavor

**Recommended:** 'Hansel,' 'Gretel,' 'Fairytale Hybrid' (all long baby eggplants and very early), 'Rosa Bianca'  
*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,' 'Dazzling Blue,' 'Rainbow Lacinato'

*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

**Recommended:** 'King Richard,' 'Bleu de Solaise,' 'Large American Flag'

*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, 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,' 'Marvel of Four Seasons,' 'Red Sails,' 'Little Gem,' 'Parris Island,' 'Black seeded Simpson'

*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:** 'Ambrosia' (cantaloupe), 'Bush Star' (cantaloupe), 'Jubilee' (watermelon), 'Sugar Baby' (watermelon), 'White Wonder,' 'Crane'

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

## Onions

Sweet flavor—sweet onions will not be sweet if soil has too much sulfur (most soil in Sonoma County has some sulfur)

Slow bolting —bolting has more to do with environmental stress and other factors that check growth rather than variety

**Recommended:** 'Evergreen White' (green bunching), 'Ailsa Craig' (yellow), 'Dakota Tears' (yellow), 'Newburg' (yellow), 'White Sweet Spanish' (white), 'Super Star' (white), 'Rossa di Milano' (red), 'Early Red Burger' (red)

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

*Intermediate day and long day types perform best in Sonoma County which has a latitude of 38° N*

*Because of the shallow roots, rate of growth is largely determined by surface nitrogen, water, 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,’ ‘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), ‘Anaheim’ (hot), ‘Red Beauty’ (bell), ‘Gypsy’ (early; can be harvested green, yellow, or red), ‘Jimmy Nardello’ (sweet)

*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

Look for “Certified Seed Potato” tag to avoid disease issues

**Recommended:** ‘Carola,’ ‘Red Gold,’ ‘German Fingerling,’ ‘Yukon Gold,’ ‘White Rose,’ ‘Kennebec’

*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 (makes a great jack-o’-lantern; has very thick flesh to use in pies), ‘Spirit,’ ‘Autumn Gold,’ ‘Cinderella,’ ‘Musquee de Provence’

*Choose according to use—jack-o’-lantern or cooking*

*Do not cook pumpkins used as jack-o’-lanterns due to bacterial issues*

*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), ‘Cherry Belle’

## Spinach

Slow bolting, upright growth habit

**Recommended:** ‘Bloomsdale Long Standing,’ ‘America,’ ‘Giant Winter,’ ‘Abundant Bloomsdale’

*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’ (white stems), ‘Pot of Gold’ (gold stems), ‘Rhubarb’ (red stems)

*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), ‘Black Beauty’ (zucchini), ‘Costata Romanesco’ (striped zucchini), ‘Peter Pan’ (scallop), ‘Sundance’ (crookneck), ‘Early Prolific Straightneck’ (yellow)

*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,’ ‘Waltham,’ ‘Sweet Meat,’ ‘Sweet Mama,’ ‘Cha Cha Kabocha,’ ‘Table King’

*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 and 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:** There are hundreds of tomatoes to recommend. These are only a few:

‘Sungold’ (cherry), ‘Juliet’ (grape), ‘Better Bush’ (container), ‘Early Girl’ (salad), ‘Stupice,’ ‘Hillbilly,’ ‘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*

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For help with your garden problems, call the Master Gardener hotline at 565-2608 or visit the Master Gardener information desk in the University of California Cooperative Extension office (133 Aviation Blvd., #109, Santa Rosa), or ask a Master Gardener at your local farmers market or the Sonoma County Fair or other event. See our website at <http://ucanr.edu/sites/scmg/> for additional publications.

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