



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

This publication was created by the UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County Food Gardening Specialists. Special thanks to Tommie Smith, Sonoma County Master Gardener and Wendy Krupnik of iGrow Sonoma for their contributions and suggestions.

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.

The University of California prohibits discrimination or harassment of any person in any of its programs or activities. (Complete nondiscrimination policy statement can be found at <http://ucanr.org/sites/anrstaff/files/107734.doc>). Inquiries regarding the University’s equal employment opportunity policies may be directed to John Sims, Affirmative Action Contact, University of California, Davis, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2801 2nd Street, Davis, CA 95618, (530) 750-1397.