

KPOV - *The Point*
Gardening: Get Good At It
“Late Harvesting and Wintering Over”
September 25, 2018

Recent cold nights are bringing our vegetable season to an end. But there are some vegetables you can easily leave for late harvest and some crops need special attention over the winter. Here are some tips for carrots, turnips, potatoes, strawberries and asparagus.

LATE HARVESTING

Cool weather increases the sweetness of CARROTS so for those who crave really tasty carrots, a good strategy is to leave them in the ground into early winter. That works well here as long as you protect the ground from freezing. Putting on several inches of mulch in early fall should do the trick. A bright color is your key to knowing the carrots still have good flavor and texture, so be sure to check them every now and then to determine if you need to harvest. Be sure to water thoroughly before harvesting – you want the root to have absorbed lots of water.

TURNIPS are another crop that can be left in the ground into the winter. Again, the ground should be covered with a mulch to prevent freezing. It's a good idea to check for root maggots before mulching to be sure your crop isn't too damaged to save.

POTATOES grown for storage should be harvested after the vines have died. To check crop maturity, dig up one or two hills. If the skins on the tubers are thin and rub off easily, they're not fully mature and should be left in the ground for a few more days before harvesting. If the potatoes are bruised or cut during harvesting, use them as soon as possible.

Any potatoes with green skins were exposed to sunlight but they can be eaten once the skin is removed. Knobby potatoes were caused by irregular irrigation during tuber development. Watering on a regular basis (about once a week) during dry periods will help prevent this problem.

OVER-WINTERING

Two crops that people really like to grow here in Central Oregon are strawberries and asparagus. Both of these crops are perennial, coming back every year and need extra help to get safely through the winter.

STRAWBERRIES must be protected from severe winter temperatures so you should select a cold hardy variety. Check our website for ones that do well here. Strawberry crowns and flower buds may be damaged or killed at temperatures colder than 22°. Flower buds are set in the early fall so the upper part of the plant needs protection. The persistent freeze/thaw cycle we have here in winter can lift plants out of the soil and cause severe root damage.

Covering plants with 2 to 3 inches of loose straw, pine needles or wood shavings after the temperatures drop below freezing will help minimize the winter damage. Leave the covering on until the risk of severe cold weather is passed in the spring.

People often ask if they should cut down their ASPARAGUS fern tops. The answer is yes if the plant had insect or disease problems during the season. Cut them down when they turn yellow or brown.

There is no need to cut the fern top if the plant was healthy. The purpose of the top is to provide food reserves in the crown for next year's crop – the bushier the fern top, the better the yield next season. Over wintered tops help protect the crown from winter damage and should be removed in spring before emergence of new spears.

Be sure to clear your asparagus bed of any weeds before winter. Asparagus doesn't like any competition for nutrition or moisture so a weed free bed is a must all year. Removing them in late fall will prevent them from getting too well established. Pull weeds rather than hoeing to avoid damaging the crown and roots.

Asparagus roots are shallow and in danger of cold damage and frost heave. Mulching with several inches of straw, compost or aged manure will protect the roots, hold moisture, reduce weed growth and delay early spring emergence of spears.

For more information on this and many other gardening topics or a copy of this transcript with a resource list, visit our website www.gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV's The Point.

Resources:

Yard and Garden: Harvesting and Storing Potatoes

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/yard-and-garden-harvesting-and-storing-potatoes>

Growing Strawberries in Your Home Garden

<http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/jspui/bitstream/1957/18010/1/ec1307.pdf>

Selecting Berry Crop Varieties for Central Oregon

<http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/19856/ec1621-e.pdf>

Growing Asparagus in the Home Garden

www.hort.purdue.edu/hort/ext/Pubs/HO/HO_096.pdf