

Low-Maintenance Vegetables for Busy Gardeners

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So you want to grow and preserve your own food, but are a little short on time? No problem.

Here are the edibles that take the least amount of effort on your part, and why.

Carrots: Let me recommend to you a carrot mix such as 'Kaleidoscope' (**shown**), which not only offers a wonderful variety of color but also different days to harvest times. Simply brush away some of the soil around your carrots to see which ones are ready when you are. Mulch well in the fall and you can harvest fresh carrots long into the winter months.

Garlic: We plant garlic cloves here in the Northeast in the fall, and harvest late in the summer. You can eat some of the garlic scapes that form on hardneck varieties shortly before the harvest, likewise the greens from the softnecks. If they are well mulched, you shouldn't need to bother with them at all. Once they are ready, simply store in cold holding.

Walking onions or perennial onions: So simple to grow and harvest, year after year. When you need an onion, simply pick a whole scallion or cut the green top. No problems; unless you pick them all, they'll come back.

Herbs: Most grow like weeds and containing them may prove to be the hardest part. So really, contain them; they'll be fine that way. Harvest herbs as you need them, then simply freeze or hang upside down in a brown lunch bag to dry. Store dry herbs in a covered container. Thinking of planting a little parsley or cilantro for chili? Why not? If your cilantro bolts and goes to seed, all the better; gather up those seeds because now you have coriander.

Winter squash: Whereas most summer squash types need some looking after and routine harvesting, the winter varieties can be left unattended until the frost comes. Gently harvest and bring indoors where they will keep for months. How long depends on the variety and storage conditions, but most should last well into the winter.

Summer squash: There's always an exception, right? The heirloom summer squash 'Tatume', if ignored or forgotten, will simply grow a harder rind and can be harvested and stored like a winter squash. Does it get any better than that?

Tomatoes and peppers: Many make think they do not have time to grow these garden lovelies. Not so. If they are producing more than you can handle, well, first off good for you! Don't stress it though, simply bring them indoors, wash them off and toss in the freezer. Yes, you read that right. The tomato skins will easily come off when later you thaw them out for your famous chili recipe; and the peppers? The sweets will get sweeter and the hots more intense after freezing. How's that chili sounding now?

Dry beans: Plant the seeds of dry beans, walk away. Come back at the end of the season and harvest. Shake the tops of the plants in a large paper bag to remove the seeds. Sort and done. Sounds to me like you now have everything you need for that chili, and wouldn't it be wonderful served with or in a winter squash?