



## FALL | Sun Just the Right Ripe: Ready to Pick

### Summary:

Growing Gardeners love to explore by picking leaves off trees, twigs off the ground, and gathering rocks. Another thing they might want to gather is produce from the garden but how can we tell if it is ripe?

### Before Visiting the Garden:

**Gather:** A container for harvesting veggies, wet wipes (for cleaning up any juicy drips or spills on hands/clothes)

**Explore:** “The Greengrocer” by Giuseppe Arcimboldo. What vegetables can you identify in this portrait? Turn the portrait upside down, what do you see now?

**Read:** *Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert

### In the Garden:

The sun and our plants work together to create delicious food for us to eat. A ripe tomato is the reward for your careful tending. But, you can pick too early or too late. Let’s survey our garden then spend some time assessing what is ripe.

### Questions to Explore:

- What colors is the produce? Is the whole vegetable one color?
- How big are the vegetables?
- Gently prod the veggies, what do they feel like? Introduce words like juicy, plump, hard, soft, tough, dry, and firm.
- Do you smell anything from the veggies or herbs?

### Activity:

We use all our senses to determine ripeness. Plants have different rates of maturity, but each plant provides clues to help us know when they are ready. You can always consult your garden coordinator or the library for additional tips. Below are a few common veggies and their signs of ripeness:

1. Tomatoes: First check what variety you have, not all tomatoes are red! The whole tomato should be a shiny red/yellow/orange/ even purple(!) depending on variety. The fruit will be firm, but not hard. Harvesting should be as easy as a light snap of the stem from the plant. If you find the tomatoes are splitting, harvest them to avoid attracting more critters and make sure your plants are getting enough water.
2. Pole beans: The pod should be firm and fully green. Don’t let them grow too big—where the inside seed is visible and the pod gets woody. Gently snap them off the vine and munch away! Pole beans can be harvested throughout the season.
3. Cucumbers: There are two main varieties: slicing and dill (for pickles!). As with our other vegetables, they should be fully green and firm, but not hard. The slicing variety should be between 6 – 8 inches and the dills about 2 inches. Don’t let them turn yellow, unless you have the lemon cucumbers, as that means they are overripe.
4. General rule of thumb—you want your produce to be firm, but not hard, a tricky line, but err on the side of just ripe rather than overripe. And keep harvesting! Many veggie varieties will continue to produce throughout the season.

### Beyond the Garden | Arcimboldo Inspiration:

Using the Arcimboldo print as inspiration, take your produce home and arrange it in a fun portrait. Can you paint your own vegetable visage? Have fun and enjoy your produce as a post paint snack.

### Continue Exploring | Supporting Materials

Recipes for using your yummy produce: <http://www.letsmove.gov/eat-healthy>