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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
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Thursday, August 31, 1944

QUESTION BOX:

ANSWERS FROM:

When harvest vegetables?
How not to "spill beans?"
If frost comes early?

Garden specialists of the U. S.
Department of Agriculture

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Congratulations, Victory Gardeners, on your high rating as advance planners.

Believe it or not, right now, with midsummer still on the calendar, questions are coming in about problems the Autumn frosts will bring. That puts Victory Gardeners right in the front row with those highly-thought-of beings who think before things happen instead of afterwards.

Even the newest gardeners are looking ahead. Here is a question from one of them. She says: "I was careful to observe the Victory Garden objective that recommends planting enough of the vegetables that mature late in the season so you will have some to store for winter. But I've never gardened before and I'm not sure I will know just when these are ready for harvesting. Can you tell me how I may know?"

Garden specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say different varieties indicate maturity in different ways. And some vegetables can be harvested when storage time comes, whether they have reached the mature state or not. Beets and carrots are in that class.

This questioner does not list her vegetables but I am sure she must have some onions, for these were very popular with gardeners this year. You can be sure onions are growing as long as their tops stay upright. When the tops turn down and lose their green color, you can harvest your onions. He suggests pulling up the onions if the soil is not too hard, or lifting with a small tool. Be careful not

to cut into the onion bulb. Lay the onions, bulb and dry top - on a surface of the row for about a day. Then they are ready to store. If the weather should turn quite hot, put them in a crate or something similar where they will be well ventilated, and shade them while they are drying.

Our new gardener need not worry about her carrots, turnips and beets. These crops are not injured by moderate frost. She needs not watch for signs of maturity for the tops stay green and the roots keep growing, right up to harvest. Most people like carrots and beets when they are young, or have just reached full size, so that might be a feature to keep in mind. Pull these root crops and cut off the tops when the soil is dry. And be careful not to cut into the fleshy part of the root when taking off the tops. Leave what the professional gardeners call the crown - where the leaf stems join the root. I hope this new gardener has some parsnips for she can leave these right in the garden row. Some of our old-time gardeners wouldn't tolerate using parsnips until they had had a few weeks of cold weather.

But if this new gardener has sweet potatoes, she will need to keep watch for frost. If a killing frost should come while they are still in the ground, it is important to dig the tubers immediately as the vines will decay quickly and this spreads to the tubers. Sweet potatoes are really tropical in nature and cannot stand a temperature below 40 degrees. Their flavor improves by a curing after digging - keeping them in a warm place - around 80 or 85 degrees - for about two weeks.

Another gardener writes: "I went in for beans in a big way this year. I have bush beans, limas, and pole beans in with my corn. I was determined to have enough - beetles or no beetles. We were able to keep down the beetle population quite well and now I have more beans than we can use or wish to can. My family likes dried beans in winter menus. Could I dry some of these for winter?"

Yes, say our garden specialists, all of these beans are well liked for winter use. They suggest that she pick fresh beans for table use now from only a part of

the rows and let the rest of the vines produce the winter crop. She should watch the pods after they are well filled with beans and pick them as they ripened but before the pods burst open and "spill the beans." The pods will turn yellow or brown and begin to wither. They should be spread in a warm, dry place until thoroughly dry. They then are ready to shell and store.

Here's one last question. "Suppose we have unusually early frost this year. Are there any vegetables I could save from the garden?" Our garden men say tomatoes, peppers and egg plants can be kept for two weeks or longer if brought in before damaged by the frost. The tomatoes may be used green or those nearly mature would probably ripen on a shelf or window sill, after they are brought in. Some gardeners pull up the vine, leave the fruit on it, and hang in the basement for ripening.

And here's hoping all Victory Gardeners have well filled storage bins this winter.

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