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December Tips VEGETABLES

- Don't forget to use some of those vegetables still out in your garden: carrots, turnip greens, kale, or other hardy ones.
- A diary or record book can help the home vegetable gardener keep track of the factors affecting the garden -- planting dates, weather, and size of harvest.
- To sprout cress seeds, sprinkle the seeds on a moist paper towel and cover with a second towel. Roll up, and place in a plastic bag. Close the bag, and keep it in a warm place for a few days. The sprouts will be very pungent and can be used to spice-up foods. Do not leave too long or the roots become impressed in the paper towel.
- When choosing peppers to cook, remember that ripe red, yellow, orange, white, or purple ones have a sweeter taste when cooked than green ones.
- Try using 3-inch pumpkins instead of gourds for a Christmas table decoration. Some varieties to consider are Sweetie Pie, Jack Be Little, Munchkin, and the white Baby Boo PVP.
- The Jerusalem artichoke, a perennial sunflower, is a native of the Great Plains. The Italians gave it a name that meant "turning to the sun" which the English thought sounded like Jerusalem. In some supermarkets today, they are marketed as "sun chokes."
- Recent research indicates that you can actually improve yields by growing produce in smaller containers. When scientists at the USDA Plant Stress Laboratory in Beltsville, Maryland, grew 'Better Bush' tomatoes in 3.5-inch and 11-inch plastic pots for 12 weeks, they found they could get roughly twice as much fruit from plants in the smaller containers from the same space. Plants confined to the 3.5-inch pots were somewhat dwarfed, and their fruits were either slightly smaller or less abundant than those on unstressed plants, but the overall yield per area was actually greater since three small plants could fit into the space occupied by one large plant. The trick to getting good yields from plants in smaller pots appears to be providing them with adequate water and nutrition. The tomatoes in this experiment were fed and watered three to six times a day.
- Alabama vegetable breeders report that 'Isbell,' a buttercrunch lettuce developed by researchers at the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, is supposedly less attractive to rabbits than Bibb or Boston varieties. It also has superior yield, cold hardiness, and resistance to insects and diseases. Its flat, smooth, dark-green leaves are good in salads. Many lettuces become bitter after harvesting, but 'Isbell' is noted to hold its sweet flavor.
- Use a combination of red and green sweet peppers frozen from last summer's garden to give holiday food a seasonal flair.

- Keep several jars of sprouts going to keep your family in fresh greens all winter long.
- Chicory is an easy, winter, salad plant to force. Plant roots in a box, and place in a warm, dark place, such as your cellar. Keep the soil moderately moist. The shoots will be ready for cutting in three to five weeks. Rhubarb crowns also respond to this treatment.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dorn, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines, and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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