



When to Harvest Small Fruits in the

EDIBLE GARDEN

A close-up photograph of a raspberry branch with several bright red, ripe raspberries and some yellow flowers. The background is a soft-focus green garden.

How to Harvest Small Fruits from the Edible Garden

Small fruits such as strawberries, raspberries, currants, saskatoons, and haskap are one of the biggest delights of the growing season – it's hard to beat fresh fruit from the edible garden! Here are some suggestions to properly time the harvest of these berries and get the most out of your crops.



STRAWBERRY



If you've just planted strawberries in your edible garden, don't harvest them during the first year. In that first year, only remove the blossoms from strawberry plants.

In the second year, you can pick fruit! When you see blooms on your plants, you'll know that the fruit will be ready and ripe in approximately 4 to 6 weeks. The fruit at the centre tends to be ready to pick first.

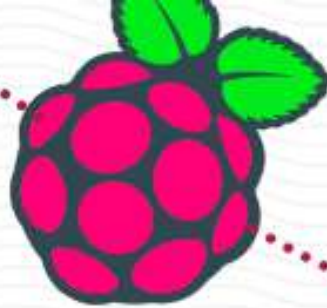
Make sure the fruit is completely red before picking. If the berries become too ripe, they will start to darken in colour and become soft.

Don't grab the strawberry by the fruit when picking. You want to pinch the stem directly above the berry between your fingers and cleanly snip it off. Take your time when picking so that the plants are not harmed.

Strawberries should be put into a cool location or the refrigerator as soon as they've been harvested, and consumed within two or three days.



RASPBERRY



When you think of raspberries, you usually think of bright red ones, but there are also black, yellow, and even purple types.

It is time to pick raspberries when they are at full colour. To harvest raspberries, gently hold the berry between your thumb and forefinger and slowly remove it from the stem. There will be a little core left on the plant. If the raspberry doesn't easily part with the core, it's not ripe enough yet.

Raspberries are not ready all at once on individual plants, and the harvest period can last a few weeks. Raspberries are too ripe when the fruit begins to darken, turn grey, or become mushy.



CURRANTS

On the prairies, currants are usually harvested at the end of July or early August. Black currants take a bit longer to ripen than red currants, sometimes up to three weeks later.

Currants are borne on the branches in trusses called strings. When the whole string is fully coloured, and the fruits are no longer hard, it is time to pick them. You can pinch off the entire cluster with your fingers or use a small pair of scissors to do the job.

For most currants, not all the fruit on a currant shrub will ripen at once. Currants have a long harvesting period – you can generally pick fruit for just over a month.

Currants should be eaten within one week or frozen.



HASKAP

Haskap are usually harvested in late June through late July. It is tricky to know exactly when haskap berries are ripe – the easiest way to tell is to do a taste test. They will turn into a dark blue-purple on the outside and you will think they are ready, but they may taste very sour. Once the berries turn dark purple in colour, give them a few more weeks to sweeten up.

Haskap are extremely soft berries and crush easily if you hold them too tightly. To harvest them, gently grasp the base of the berry by the thumb and forefinger and tug it from the stem. It should give easily if the berry is ripe.

Haskap berries do not ripen all at the same time on individual shrubs, but the window for harvesting is very small, about one to two weeks. Haskap shrubs typically do not produce much fruit until they are in their third year of growth.



SASKATOON BERRY



Like haskap, saskatoons usually start producing a sizeable amount of berries when the plants are about three years old. The fruit does not ripen all at once on the bushes, and the harvest period is roughly three weeks to a month in length.

Saskatoon berries are usually ready to pick in July. The berries are ripe when they are a dark purple colour. If the berries are hard and shrivelled, they will not be good.

When ripe, saskatoon berries should be easily pulled away from the stems without breaking the stems or bruising the berries.



HARVESTING & STORAGE TIPS

Remember that fruits such as strawberries, raspberries, haskap, saskatoons, and currants will not ripen further once harvested, so make sure they are completely ready before you pick!

The best time to pick small fruits is in the morning, when temperatures are cool. Harvesting in the heat of the day can make for mushy fruit. Many of these fruits are fragile and soft when fully ripe and they can squish easily. Fill shallow containers with a thin or single layer of berries only. This is especially important for haskap and raspberries.

Do not wash berries until you are ready to use them – it increases the risk of damaging the fruit and encourages mould.

Refrigerate your berry harvest as quickly as you can after picking. If you don't plan to eat them fresh, freeze or otherwise process them for long-term storage.



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