

GROWING PLACES

EARLY SUMMER II

Whether you worship the sun or prefer your beach umbrella, your tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers and squash adore the sunshine we've been getting. You may have noticed them recently shoot up and begin producing fruit. And while it's pretty easy to tell when a tomato is ripe for picking, other produce is less familiar.

Eggplant, for example, is often quite large when seen in the supermarket. In your garden, look for fruit that is 6-8 inches long, glossy, and springy to the touch. If the skin is dull or brown, or the fruit is overlarge, it's gone past its prime. In that respect, summer squash and zucchini are similar. We're confident that you'll be harvesting more squash than you can eat even if you pick them small—again just 6-8 inches. Let them go much larger and you'll find the rind has toughened and the inside has turned to a seedy, watery mess you'll end up wanting to scoop out anyway. On the other hand, younger, small squash will be sweet with a smooth texture. We also recommend taking a pair of scissors or clippers out to help you harvest without damaging the stem of any plant with lots of twisting and pulling.

Keep an eye on your tomato plants. They're the toddlers of the garden—innocently getting themselves into trouble the moment you turn your back. They grow rapidly and are liable to flop to the ground without sturdy support (e.g., cages or stakes and ties), so check in consistently and tie up drooping new growth. Prune away suckers as best you can—it's so easy to miss a few! Look in the space between a plant's main stem and a branch; you'll see a new leaf attempting to grow. Pruning these suckers off will keep the plant upright, allow for better air circulation and improve the quality of the fruit.

And as always in the summer, check the moisture content of your soil, keep the weeds in control and watch for signs of pests or disease to keep your garden green!

GROWING GUIDE | PAGES

Eggplant | 36

Summer squash | 50-51

Seasonal Checklist | 86

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