

# How to Cure Vegetables

By Melissa K Norris

When cured properly, specific vegetables will last for months, even if you don't have a root cellar or basement.

The chart and info below is shared from my book [\*The Family Garden Plan: Grow a Year's Worth of Sustainable and Healthy Food\*](#)

Crop	Temperature	Humidity	Curing Time	Signs Curing is Finished
Garlic and Onion	68–85 °F (don't exceed 85 °F)	70%	Up to 2 weeks	Outer skins are dry and papery, stems have shrunk and are hard (no green shows when you cut the stems near the neck)
Potato	45–60 °F	85–95%	2 weeks	Small nicks and cuts are hardened
Sweet Potato	80–85 °F	80%	2 weeks	Small nicks and cuts are hardened
Winter Squash	80 °F	80–85%	10–14 days	Stem is dry and skin is tougher

Curing allows the outer skin to dry out and harden, making it harder for pathogens or decay to set in. If you're not planning on storing the vegetables and you want to eat them immediately, you can skip the curing process. If possible, harvest on a dry day at the beginning of a sunny stretch.

Do not wash your vegetables when curing. Brush off any large dirt clumps and lay them out in a single layer with good ventilation.

## Garlic and Onion

Onion and garlic curing temps should not exceed 85 degrees Fahrenheit, with optimal temps between 68–85°F and 70 percent relative humidity. Temperatures over 90 degrees and direct sunlight can cause sun scald; avoid this.

The curing process can take up to two weeks (or longer if temps are cooler and higher humidity). You know your onions and garlic are cured when the outer skins are dry and

papery and the stems have shrunk and are hard (no green shows when you cut the stems near the neck). Long-term storage for onions and garlic is 32 degrees Fahrenheit (don't let them freeze) with 60 to 70 percent humidity and out of direct sunlight.

However, I braid mine and store them in our back pantry with an average of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit, and my garlic lasts a full year.

## **Potatoes**

Potatoes, both sweet and regular, require curing. To help toughen the skins, stop watering a few weeks before harvest. Don't wash, but brush off dirt before curing. If you must wash your potatoes, make sure they dry thoroughly before laying them out to cure.

All varieties of potatoes, except sweet potatoes, are best cured at 45 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit with 85 to 95 percent humidity for two weeks. You'll notice that small nicks and cuts will harden up. Potatoes should be stored out of the light (or they'll turn green due to chlorophyll, which can mean the presence of solanine, a toxic alkaloid in large amounts) at 40 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit with 90 percent humidity. They'll shrivel up in drier conditions and sprout in warmer conditions.

We tried storing ours in our unheated camper trailer, but the fluctuating temperatures and lower humidity resulted in shriveled and sprouted potatoes after three months, with several turned bad.

## **Sweet Potatoes**

For sweet potatoes, lay out the tubers (be careful not to bruise or puncture them) and allow them to dry for up to two weeks at 80 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit with 80 percent humidity. The higher the temperature the faster they'll cure, so if temps are lower than 80 degrees, go the full two weeks. The curing time and higher temperatures also help develop the starches and sugars that make sweet potatoes, well, sweet.

Store sweet potatoes between 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Even if you don't have perfect temperatures for curing, don't worry about it; just do your best.

## **Winter Squash**

To cure winter squash, pick when squash is ripe; indicators or ripeness are color change, skin toughening, and a drying stem.

When picking, leave about two inches of the stem; this helps prevent oxygen from getting into the squash and improves storage time.

Wipe off dirt and dry thoroughly (I will often use a vinegar-dampened towel) and lay in a well-ventilated area at 80 degrees Fahrenheit with the humidity 80 to 85 percent for 10 to 14 days.

After curing winter squash for two weeks, store in a cool, dry area at around 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

I store the majority in my back pantry with a few in the kitchen where the temps are closer to the lower to mid-sixties, and my butternut, acorn, and spaghetti squash last between four and six months.

Squash in the cooler part of the house will last six months plus, with our spaghetti squash lasting the longest.

Make sure to check them routinely in case one does go bad. During storage, make sure garlic, onions, potatoes and sweet potatoes have adequate air flow and aren't exposed to light.

I hang up my braids of onions and garlic and store potatoes in mesh bags in our pantry closet. Any containers used to hold potatoes or onions should be breathable; cardboard boxes and paper bags also work well. If using plastic containers, make sure they're not sealed and have a way to breathe or vent.

### **What if my temps aren't quite warm enough**

We rarely have a full two weeks of exactly correct temps for onions and garlic in the fall. Erring on the cooler side, simply increase the curing time to three to four weeks.

If you don't have those types of temperatures (come harvest time in September and October we're never this warm), you can cure winter squash in a corner of your house at cooler temps; optimal is around 50 degrees, making sure you turn them over and no rot sets in.

**Want to know how much to plant of each crop for a year's worth of food per person? [Go here to get the free chart!](#)**