

Cooking on the Cheap: Snacking from Your Garden



Believe it or not, for me, one of the toughest parts about gardening is figuring out how to utilize the harvest. Often, I find myself sharing the abundance with others because I can't handle it all. When the determinate tomatoes set their fruit all at once, I'm overwhelmed by what to do with them all. When the cucumber plants produce more than I can eat in a week, I panic over how to use them up. A little bit of foresight goes a long way to fully utilize everything in the garden. Canning, dehydrating, and finding other ways to incorporate veggies in all my meals is one way to use up what I pick from the garden, but I don't always have time to plan and prepare foods this way.

Canning requires a fair amount of time, which I don't always have. Quick-pickling is easy and fun, but I couldn't possibly

consume all those pickles on my own!

I try to bake, roast, and sauce-up all the vegetables in my garden, but when the harvest is bountiful, that's not always enough to get through it all. It's taken a lot of practice to prevent waste, but it still happens. I've had to really sink my teeth into meal planning to maximize my returns and minimize wasted produce. Meal planning, in combination with crop planning, is the surest way to avoid disappointment.

Another way that I incorporate fresh vegetables into my diet is by snacking on them. By munching on raw (or cooked if you prefer) veg, I not only incorporate plenty of healthy nutrients in my daily caloric intake, I also use up otherwise tough to cook with veggies.

Garden Snack Ideas

Here are a few examples of snack ideas along with extra tips for using your harvest:

Celery: Whether I'm growing in the garden or snatching some up at the local farm stand, celery is one of my favorite veggie snacks. I love to eat it with peanut butter. If you get sick of snacking on celery snicks, use this veg for flavoring all sorts of dishes, including soups and stews.

Carrots: Who doesn't love a freshly picked carrot? Last week, I harvested a patch, and my dogs were close by, eager to delight in this sweet treat. Carrots taste great alone and are the quintessential healthy snack food. Zap them in the food processor if you're in the mood for a more substantial meal and make a carrot slaw for lunch or to accompany your dinner.

Tomatoes: When you think of a snack, you're probably not thinking about salads. But a plate of fresh sliced tomatoes, topped with salt, pepper, and bocconcini cheese is a gourmet-style afternoon indulgence. It's the perfect reward for

growing those delicious tomatoes, isn't it? Entertaining guests? Make cherry tomato skewers for easy one-handed eating.

Cucumbers: These taste great on their own with a little bit of salt and pepper. It's one of the only ways I enjoy eating cucumber – besides inside a sandwich.

Snap peas: If I'm not cutting these up to enjoy inside a stir fry, I'm eating them raw along with other fresh veggies.

Kale: Bake these low and slow for a few minutes or pop them inside a dehydrator to make kale chips. Adjust the salt content to your liking. Kale chips are a great alternative to regular chips loaded with saturated fat.

Berries: If you're lucky enough to grow any type of berry, boy, do you have a snack-worthy fruit on your hands. I've only started growing berries, so my patches are smaller than I'd like and only churn out a few strawberries at a time. How to enjoy a handful of berries as a snack? Eat them as is, or add them to yogurt or ice cream.

For the frugal gardeners, snacking doesn't have to be an expensive pursuit. Avoid costly, highly-processed foods from the grocery store and enjoy the tasty treasures sitting right in front of you!

What are your favorite ways to enjoy your veggie snacks? Tell me in the comments!

Next week, I'll be back with some meal planning tips to help you use what you grow, along with some suggestions of meal planning tools that I love and use frequently.