

GARDEN NEWS

Well, we've managed to step away from the late summer vegetable garden for just long enough to bring you a special harvest edition of Garden News this week. We hope that September finds your garden overflowing with tender green beans, juicy peppers, succulent squashes, savory herbs, sweet corn on the cob, pungent onions, crisp flavorful greens, and of course, heavy loads of rich taste-of-summer tomatoes.



EXTRA! EXTRA! KEEPING PESTO GREEN

If you've got a bumper crop of basil ready to harvest, remember that making and freezing pesto is an easy and delicious way to preserve basil for eating later in the year. This week our "lead story" is about an exciting new trick we've learned to improve on our favorite pesto recipes: how to keep pesto a beautiful, bright green, even days after making it.

Unfortunately basil and other tender leafy greens quickly turn brown when cut, torn, or bruised and exposed to the air, so your vibrant green pesto usually ends up a dark green-brown after sitting for even a few minutes. However, a little experimentation in the Log House kitchen determined that a quick dip in boiling water will fix the leaves' color, maintaining the fresh emerald color of live basil.

Remove basil leaves from their stems and place them in a colander. Bring a big pot of salted water to a boil; when boiling, lower the colander with the leaves into the boiling water briefly – for no more than 5 or 10 seconds. Drain well, then continue with the pesto recipe. Our tasters found this made a smooth green paste, with no sacrifice of flavor or texture.

Further research found differing opinions on keeping pesto green; some cooks do believe that blanching can alter the flavor a bit, so here are a few alternative suggestions:

- *Add lemon juice or citric acid to the pasta cooking water or directly to the pesto. (Some find this adds too much tartness).
- *Add a dash of white balsamic or rice vinegar. (Again, it may alter the taste a bit.)
- *Mix in a little heavy cream, about 1 oz. cream per 3 oz. pesto.
- *Use pine nuts rather than walnuts in your recipe.

It's also best to make pesto as late as possible before serving, adding the basil last as you process the ingredients. And if you do end up with slightly brownish leftover pesto the next day, go ahead and enjoy it as it is – the sweet spicy flavor lasts much longer than the bright color!

(In case you missed them earlier, see our back issues of Garden News for general basil info; or visit our [pesto page](#) to find recipes and serving ideas.)

TOMATO TIPS FOR HARVEST TIME

Here in the Northwest, a recent stretch of cooler-and-wetter-than-ideal weather unfortunately has slowed down tomato ripening a bit. You may find you have a lot of big green tomatoes that just won't turn red; or the ripe tomatoes you do harvest may be less sweet and flavorful than usual. (For more on why this is, see the Entrée article in Wednesday's Eugene *Register-Guard*

<http://www.registerguard.com/rg/Weekly/Entree/story.csp?cid=128495&sid=38&fid=2>)

There are a few things you can do to help them to ripen before the cool rainy weather really sets in:

*Stop watering tomato plants in late August or early September.

*Remove all of the new blossoms and very small fruits, and pinch out the growing tips so plants direct all their energy into ripening the existing fruits (do this about a month before your first autumn frost date – around September 1st in the Willamette Valley).

*Hope for a month or so of warm, dry, sunny weather!

Remember, when the first heavy rains or frosts seem imminent, you can go ahead and harvest any mature but unripened tomatoes and bring them inside to ripen. Throw out those that are blemished or have broken skin, then put the rest in shallow cardboard boxes and leave them in a cool dark place to continue ripening. Check them every few days, weeding out any that have developed soft spots or blemishes, and eating those that have ripened. The good ones should go on ripening over the next month or two, supplying you with a steady stream of tomatoes into November or even December. They don't burst with flavor like the vine-ripened tomatoes during the peak of the harvest, but will be fine for most purposes. You can't argue with fresh homegrown tomatoes at Thanksgiving!



Happy Harvesting!

Previous issues of GARDEN NEWS may be viewed at www.loghouseplants.com/gardennews.htm

Recent topics:

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[Issue 2, March 28, 2008](#) (Sweet peas, edible peas, perennials)

[Issue 3, April 4, 2008](#) (Nasturtium, baskets)

[Issue 4, April 11, 2008](#) (Arctotis, veggies)

[Issue 5, April 18, 2008](#) (Vines & Screens, background plants, cut flower collection)

[Issue 6, April 25, 2008](#) (Tea herbs, Woodfield lupine)

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