

## Handy Harvest Helpers

by Rita Pelczar

**B**EING ABLE to pick a bounty of vegetables and fruits fresh from your kitchen garden is reward for the hours you've spent planting, watering, weeding, and patrolling for pests all season long. However, gathering and storing a bumper crop can present other challenges. Here are a number of products that I've come to depend upon to facilitate both tasks so I can better enjoy my homegrown produce.

Peppers, cucumbers, squash, and eggplant are best harvested with sharp snips or shears. Fiskars **Herb & Veggie Shears** allow you to reach in among the leaves



**Herb & Veggie Shears**

and make a precision cut that won't damage the plant. The shears are also great for cutting micro greens and snipping fresh herbs. The serrated stainless steel blades come apart for easy cleaning, and the ergonomic handle reduces hand fatigue.

The oak logs I inoculated with shiitake mushroom spores several years ago continue to delight me with a seasonal harvest. Lee Valley's **Mushroom Knife** makes harvesting simple; I use the blade's curved inner surface to cut the mushroom



**Mushroom Knife**



**Tubtrug**

cleanly off the log. If you're one of those who likes to peel the outer layer of mushroom caps before using them, the outer serrated surface works well for this purpose. If you're in the camp of folks who prefers just removing any debris from the caps before cooking or eating them, use the natural pig-hair brush that extends from the base of the zebrawood handle. The blade has a locking mechanism to hold it open when you're using it, but it folds for storage in a compact holster.

**Tubtrugs**, available from Gardener's Edge and Gardener's Supply Company, come in handy when hauling your harvest

### Sources

**Fiskars**, [www2.fiskars.com](http://www2.fiskars.com).  
**Gardener's Edge**,  
[www.gardenersedge.com](http://www.gardenersedge.com).  
**Gardener's Supply Company**,  
[www.gardeners.com](http://www.gardeners.com).  
**Lee Valley Tool Company**,  
[www.leevalley.com](http://www.leevalley.com).

from garden to kitchen. These flexible, sturdy, polyethylene buckets have built-in handles and they come in a range of sizes and bright colors. A **Tubtrug Colander**, also made of sturdy polyethylene,



**Tubtrug Colander**

is handy if you want to wash your produce before taking it into the kitchen. It also fits into the larger Tubtrugs, so you can soak and rinse directly in the bucket, which helps conserve water.

Use the durable plastic **Bramble Berry Keeper** from Gardener's Supply Company to rinse and store blueberries, black-



**Bramble Berry Keeper**

berries, or raspberries. Place the berries in the slatted inner basket and run water over them; after they drain, nestle the basket into the clear outer box with its tight-fitting lid for storing in the refrigerator.

The **Berry Scoop** from Lee Valley Tool Company removes the tedium of harvesting very small fruits, such as

elderberries, that ripen uniformly. The scoop consists of a powder-coated steel comb for raking fruits off branches and a plastic basket with a handle for catching them. Depending on your use for the berries, they may require a little fine



Berry Scoop

grooming in the kitchen to remove small pieces of stem that make it through the comb, but that doesn't take long.

Washing and thoroughly drying salad greens can be time-consuming. With the **OXO Good Grips Salad Spinner**, this job is a snap. I rinse the greens in a sinkful of cold water to remove debris. Then I scoop the leaves into the spin-



OXO Good Grips Salad Spinner

ner's slatted basket and cover it with the lid. Unlike most spinners, which require turning a handle or pulling on a retractable cord to make the basket spin, all you do with this one is push down on the knob on the lid. A non-slip base helps keep it from sliding off your counter as the centrifugal force of the spinning basket sheds excess water from the greens. *Voila!* The leaves are ready for your dinner salad or to store in a plastic bag or lettuce keeper in the fridge for later.

Many vegetables can be stored for use throughout winter in a dark, dry, cool location such as a garage, root cellar, or unheated basement. The compact **Root Storage Bin** from Gardener's Supply Company is

a great way to store root crops in such a space. The metal frame is easily assembled; it supports a jute fabric liner that you fill with layers of damp sand or sawdust for carrots, beets, celeriac, or parsnips. Potatoes and winter squash can be stored in the bin without sand or sawdust.



Root Storage Bin

With the help of all these handy products, kitchen gardeners everywhere can reap what they sow—and enjoy the payoff to its fullest. 🌿

*Rita Pelczar is a contributing editor for The American Gardener and maintains a large vegetable garden in the mountains of North Carolina.*



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