



The Out-of-Ordinary Vegetables: Miniature Vegetables

One of the new trends in vegetable markets is the appearance of many tiny and adorable looking miniature vegetables, sometimes referred to as baby or midget vegetables. The majority of vegetables sold as miniatures are immature specimens of varieties which tend to be small in size and soft in color. They are sweet in flavor and delicate in texture; for instance, baby corns.

Baby corns are simply immature ears of ordinary corn harvested at the time the silk just emerges from the husks. It is too late to harvest when silk starts to turn into a darker color or begins to dry up. The tiny ears, about two inches in size on cobs, are used in Oriental stir-fry dishes, or as pickles and in German salads (with husk on).

There are, however, true dwarf varieties in which the fully mature fruits or edible portion is usually small. These true miniature vegetables include Tom Thumb lettuce with tennis ball-size head; gold nugget carrots about two to three inches long; and the waxy, firm potato referred as yellow-flesh ladyfinger that is about an inch in diameter and four inches long.

The increased popularity of miniature vegetables began in Europe and was followed by their use in gourmet restaurants in this country.

The trend has rapidly spread in recent years. One may find many types of miniature vegetables now appearing in specialty stores, roadside stands, salad bars and conventional supermarkets. Most of them used to be imported from European countries and Asia. Lately, more and more miniature vegetables have been grown by some local growers. Some even find their way into backyard plots.

Still, the price is high for many types of miniature vegetables compared to ordinary vegetables. They are extremely perishable with very limited shelf life. To beat the high price, home gardeners ought to try to grow some of their own, since seed sources are not difficult to obtain now in this country.

Dr. Dave Wolfe, a vegetable crop specialist at Cornell University, advises that in general, normal vegetable production practices are used except for closer spacing and an earlier harvest for most miniature vegetables. The most difficult aspects may be selection of the appropriate variety, and timing of harvest to maintain size within a very small allowable margin for error.

Some of the more popular miniature vegetables and their seed sources are listed. The seed source information was compiled by Dr. Dave W. Wolfe, Cornell University, for educational purposes only; no endorsement is intended.

BEETS: Usually harvested at one inch diameter. Varieties include Burpee's Gold Beet (BP, LM), Gladiator (GU), Spinel (TM), Chioggia (LM)

CARROTS: Size at harvest varies from marble size to 4" x 3/4". There are several true miniature types including Gold Nugget (GU), Minicor (LM), Round Paris Market (LM), Golden Ball (PA), Lady Finger (FA, PA), Mini Express (VB)

EGGPLANT: Easter Egg (TW, VB), Little Fingers (HA)

LETTUCE: Most popular is a miniature (tennis ball-size) heading lettuce, Tom Thumb (FA, GU, PA, TM, VB).

ONIONS: Size at harvest is 1" diameter. Varieties include Barletta (ST), Quicksilver (JO), Silver Queen (ST).

POTATO: Most popular is Ladyfinger (GU), a yellow-fleshed variety which grows 4-5" long and 1" in diameter.

PUMPKIN: Mini-Jack (GU)

SQUASH: Often sold with flower attached. Summer types include Benning's Green Tint (GU, JO), Cousa (ST), Hybrid Daytona (GU). A winter acorn harvested immature is Jersey Golden Acorn (LM)

SWEET CORN:

Sized from 1-2" for oriental dishes and salad bars (Baby Asian (LM), to 4-5" " mini-corn on the cob" sold with husk (Golden Midget (FA, GU, JO, PA)

WATERMELON:

Yellow Doll (LM), Golden Midget (FA, GU, TM).

Seed Company Code and Addresses:

(BP) W. Atlee Burpee Company, 35 S. Briggs Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060

(FA) Farmer Seed & Nursery Company, 818 N.W. 4th St., Fairbault, MN 55021

(GU) Gurney Seed & Nursery Company, Yankton, SD 57078

(HA) Harris-Moran Seed Company, Moreton Farm, Rochester, NY 14624

(JO) Johnny's Selected Seeds, Albion, Maine 04910

(LM) LeMarche Seeds, Int., Dixon, CA

(PA) Park Seed Company, Highway 254 N., Greenwood, SC 29647

(ST) Stokes Seeds, Ltd., Box 548, Buffalo, NY 14240

(TM) Thompson & Morgan, P.O. Box 1308, Jackson, NJ 08527

(TW) Otis S. Twilley Seed Company, P.O. Box 65, Trevoise, PA. 19047

(VB) Vermont Bean Seed Company, Way's Lane, Manchester Center, VT 05255

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