

## Selecting & Storing Fruits & Vegetables

### Selecting the Best

With satiny yellow skin and a rosy blush, it looks like the perfect peach. But how will it taste once you get it home? Choosing fresh and flavorful produce can sometimes be your greatest challenge in the supermarket. Here are some tips to find great-tasting fruits and vegetables and increase your enjoyment of these healthful foods.

### Find it Fresh

With modern farming, processing and delivery, many stores are able to put produce out for sale within a day or two after it is picked. Ask your store's produce manager for delivery days so you can get to your favorite fruits and veggies before quality declines.

### Select Wisely

Vegetables that have the characteristic color, shape and size generally have the best taste and texture. However, good produce doesn't have to be picture perfect. Some of the best products don't look very good. Most bananas, for example, have a fuller flavor if they are speckled.

### Use your Senses

Contrary to some consumer practices, thumping or shaking a melon does not indicate ripeness. Instead, authorities recommend feeling a product. In general, produce that's too soft is too ripe; if it's too hard, it's not ripe enough. Try the sniff test, too. With certain fruits, like peaches and melons, a strong scent means they're ripening nicely.

### Get the Grade

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established grade standards for most fresh fruits and vegetables. The grades are most

often seen on pre-packaged apples, potatoes and onions. "U.S. Fancy" is the top grade, while "U.S. No. 1" is the most common designation. "U.S. No. 2" and "U.S. No. 3" mean lower quality.

### Look for Local Produce

Fruits and vegetables grown by local farmers may be fresher and tastier than those shipped long distances from larger farms. Once again, ask your grocery store's produce manager if any is in stock.

### Go to Market

Many communities sponsor weekly farmers' markets to provide a central, in-town site for small farms to sell their produce directly to consumers. For a list of farmers markets in South Carolina go to The South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA):

<http://agriculture.sc.gov/DisplayList.aspx?ContactListID=4>

### Take a Stand

Take a weekend drive into the country to look for roadside stands where farm families sell their produce, usually picked just hours before you buy it. Or visit a farm that allows you to pick your own strawberries, blueberries, peaches and apples. Your local county Extension agent can direct you to such places.

### Shop Seasonally

Probably one of the most important tips for finding great-tasting produce is to buy in season, when possible. Here's a guide to when certain fruits and vegetables are at their peak.

**Summer:** apricots, blueberries, cherries, eggplant, fresh herbs, green beans, hot peppers, melon, okra, peaches, plums, sweet corn, sweet peppers, tomatoes, zucchini

**Fall:** apples, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, collards, grapes, kale, pears, persimmons, pumpkins, winter squash, yams

**Winter:** beets, cabbage, carrots, citrus fruits, daikon radishes, onions, rutabagas, turnips, winter squash

**Spring:** asparagus, blackberries, green onions, leeks, lettuces, new potatoes, peas, red radishes, rhubarb, spinach, strawberries, watercress

### Wax Coating

Why are wax coatings used on some fruits and vegetables? Are they safe? Many fruits and vegetables make their own natural waxy coating to help retain moisture because most produce is 80 to 95 percent water. After harvest, but before the produce is packed and sent to the supermarket, it is repeatedly washed to clean off dirt and soil. Such extensive washing also removes the natural wax. Therefore, waxes are applied to some produce items at the packing shed to replace the natural ones that are lost. Waxes are applied in order to:

- help retain moisture in fruits and vegetables during shipping and marketing.
- help inhibit mold growth.
- protect fruits and vegetables from bruising.
- prevent other physical damage and disease.
- enhance appearance.

**Washing:** Some types of fresh produce lasts longer when stored unwashed. Beans and berries, for example, are sensitive to moisture and washing before storage can cause them to mold and rot more quickly. When storing unwashed produce safe handling is essential. Allowing unwashed produce to come into contact with other refrigerated items could allow the spread of pathogenic microorganisms that may be present in any dirt or debris on produce.

Before storing unwashed produce, brush off as much dirt and debris as possible and wipe clean with a paper towel. Package in plastic bags or storage containers. Thoroughly wash when you are ready to use.

When washing produce before storing thoroughly dry with a clean paper towel and package in plastic bags or storage containers. Refrigerating produce in a vegetable bin or crisper will help maintain best quality.

### Storage Times for Fruits & Vegetables

Food	Refrigerator	Freezer
<b>Fruits:</b>		
Apples - Ripen at room temperature for 1-2 days. Once ripe, store in plastic bags in the refrigerator crisper.	Up to 1 month	12 months cooked
Apricots	3-4 days	12 months
Avocados	3-5 days	12 months
Bananas - Store at room temperature until ripe then refrigerate. Refrigerating bananas will cause the skin to darken but not the flesh	*	Peeled 12 months
Berries - Store unwashed in plastic bags or containers. Do not remove green tops from strawberries before storing. Wash gently under cool running water before using.	2-3 days	12 months
Cherries	1 week	12 months
Citrus - grapefruit, lemons, limes and oranges	2-8 weeks	3-4 months
Grapes	1 week	1 month
Guavas	1-2 days	12 months
Kiwis (Chinese gooseberry)	7-10 days	12 months
Mangoes	2-3 days	12 months
Melons - watermelon, honeydew, cantaloupe - Store at room temperature until ripe.	3-4 days (for cut melon)	12 months
Nectarines, Peaches, Pears - Store at room temperature until ripe.	5 days	12 months
Papayas	1-2 days	12 months

Pineapples	3-5 Days	12 months
Plantains	*	12 months
Plums	3 days	12 months
Rhubarb	1 week	12 months
<b>Fruit Juices:</b>		
Concentrate	6 days	1 year
Fresh or Reconstituted	5-7 days	12 months
<b>Vegetables:</b>		
Artichokes	1 week	*
Asparagus	4 days	12 months
Beans, shell – lima, fava, and soy - Do not wash before storing. Wet beans will develop black spots and decay quickly. Wash before preparation.	2-3 days in pod 1-2 days shelled	12 months
Beets, Carrot, Parsnips, Radish, Turnip	1-2 weeks	12 months
Bok Choy	1-3 days	12 months
Broccoli - Store in loose, perforated plastic bags.	3-5 days	12 months
Brussels Sprouts – the fresher the sprout the better the flavor	1 week	12 months
Cabbage, Green, Red, Napa, Savoy - Freeze for use in cooked dishes, otherwise soggy	1-2 weeks	12 months
Cauliflower	5 days	12 months
Celery	1-2 weeks	10-12 months
Chilies and hot peppers	2 weeks	12 months
Cilantro - May be stored in plastic bags or place upright in a glass of water (stems down). Cover loosely with plastic bag.	2-3 days	*
Corn - Use immediately for best flavor.	1-2 days	8-12 months
Eggplant	3-4 days	12 months
Green Beans - Do not wash before storing. Wet beans will develop black spots and decay quickly. Wash before preparation.	3-5 days	8 months
Greens - Lettuce	5-7 days	*
Greens - spinach, collards, Swiss, chard, kale, mustard, etc.	2-5 days	10-12 months
Jicama	2-3 weeks, uncut	12 months
Kohlrabi (leaves)	2-3 days	12 months
Kohlrabi (stems)	1 week	12 months
Leeks	1 week	3-6 months
Mushrooms - Unopened and packaged will last longer	3-7 days	10-12 months
Onions, Green and Scallions - Wash carefully before eating.	1-2 weeks	3-6 months
Onions, Red, White, Yellow. Store in a cool (50° - 60° F), dark place for 2-4 weeks in a separate container from potatoes.		3-6 months, chopped
Okra	3-4 days	12 months
Parsley	2-3 days	*
Peas - Use immediately for best flavor	1-2 days	12 months
Peppers	1 week	6-8 months
Potatoes - Store in a cool (50°-60° F), dry, well-ventilated area away from light, which causes greening, for 1-2 weeks.		
Radishes	2 weeks	*
Squash, Winter and Pumpkin. Store in a cool (50°-60° F), dark place for 3-6 months.	*	12 months

Squash, Summer, Yellow Crookneck and Zucchini	4-5 days	12 months
Tomatillos	1 week	8-12 months
Tomatoes - Best quality when not refrigerated. Store at room temperature until ripe.	2-3 days once cut	12 months
Yuca (Cassava)	*	12 months

**Sources:**

1. The Universities of Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. *Garden to Table-Storing Flesh Garden Produce*. <http://www.uvm.edu/extension/food/storagechart4homeproduce.pdf>
2. Minch, Daryl L. *Home Storage of Foods, Refrigerator and Freezer Storage*. Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service need url or pages and date published
3. Fruits & Veggies. More Matters. *Fruit and Vegetable Storage 101*. <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/fruit-and-vegetable-storage-101>

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