

Storing Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Better Taste



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| Storage Location | Fruits and Melons | Vegetables |
|---|--|---|
| Store in refrigerator | apples (> 7 days) apricots Asian pears (nashi) blackberries blueberries cherries cut fruits figs grapes raspberries strawberries | artichokes asparagus green beans lima beans beets Belgian endive broccoli Brussels sprouts cabbage carrots cauliflower celery cut vegetables green onions herbs (not basil) leafy vegetables leeks lettuce mushrooms peas radishes spinach sprouts summer squashes sweet corn |
| Ripen on the counter first, then store in the refrigerator | avocados kiwifruit nectarines peaches | pears plums plumcots |
| Store only at room temperature | apples (< 7 days) bananas grapefruit lemons limes mandarins mangoes muskmelons | oranges papayas persimmons pineapple plantain pomegranates watermelons basil (in water) cucumbers† dry onions* eggplant† garlic* ginger jicama peppers† potatoes* pumpkins sweet potatoes* tomatoes winter squashes |

*Store garlic, onions, potatoes, and sweet potatoes in a well ventilated area in the pantry. Protect potatoes from light to avoid greening.

†Cucumbers, eggplant and peppers can be kept in the refrigerator for 1 to 3 days if they are used soon after removal from the refrigerator.

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The flavor of fruits and vegetables is influenced by maturity and quality at harvest and by how they are stored afterwards. To maintain the freshness and flavor of the produce you buy at the market or grow in your garden, you should know how to store it at home.

Many fruits and vegetables should be stored only at room temperature because refrigerator temperatures (usually 38° to 42°F [3.3° to 5.6°C]) damage them or prevent them from ripening to good flavor and texture. For example, when stored in the refrigerator, bananas develop black skin and do not gain good sweetness, and sweet potatoes take on off-flavors and a hard core when cooked after being refrigerated.

Watermelons lose their flavor and deep red color if they are stored for longer than 3 days in the refrigerator. Pink tomatoes ripen to a better taste and red color if they are left at room temperature. They do not turn red in the refrigerator, and even red tomatoes kept in the refrigerator lose their flavor.

Other produce can be ripened on the counter, and then stored in the refrigerator. A few fruits and fruit-type vegetables gain sugar or soften when stored at room temperature. For example, Bartlett pears turn yellow and become softer and sweeter on the counter. After they have ripened they can be stored for 1 to 3 days in the refrigerator without losing taste.

Countertop Storage

The counter storage area should be away from direct sunlight to prevent produce from becoming too warm. Fruits and vegetables that are recommended to be stored on the counter can be kept for a few days. Even so, moisture loss can be reduced by placing produce in a vented plastic bowl or a perforated plastic bag. Do not place produce in sealed plastic bags on the counter because this slows ripening and may increase off-odors and decay due to accumulation of carbon dioxide and depletion of oxygen inside the sealed bag.

Ripening in a bowl or paper bag can be enhanced by placing one ripe apple with every 5 to 7 pieces of fruit to be ripened. Apples produce ethylene that speeds ripening. (Fuji and Granny Smith do not produce much ethylene and do not enhance ripening.)

Refrigerator Storage

Refrigerated fruits and vegetables should be kept in perforated plastic bags in the produce drawers of the refrigerator. You can either purchase perforated plastic bags or make small holes with a sharp object in unperforated bags (about 20 pin holes per medium-size bag).

Separate fruits from vegetables (use one drawer for each group) to minimize the detrimental effects of ethylene produced by the fruits on the vegetables. Use all refrigerated fruits and vegetables within a few days since longer storage results in loss of freshness and flavor.

Safe Handling

To be sure fruits and vegetables are not contaminated with harmful bacteria, follow these simple steps when selecting and storing fruits and vegetables.

1. In the grocery cart and at home, keep fruits and vegetables separated from raw meat, poultry, and seafood to prevent cross-contamination.
2. Once at home, store all fresh-cut ready-to-eat prepared produce in the refrigerator to keep it cold.
3. Wash all whole fruits and vegetables, including larger items like melons, just before preparation for eating. Cut out damaged (bruised, discolored) areas before eating.
4. Before and after handling fruits and vegetables make sure your work area and utensils are clean and that your hands have been washed with hot soapy water.
5. Fruits and vegetables should be washed under running water. Soaking them in water increases the opportunity for cross-contamination and is not recommended.
6. Produce such as apples, cucumbers and melons that can be rubbed without damage should be scrubbed using clean hands or a clean scrub brush.
7. Dry washed fruits and vegetables with clean disposable paper towels.
8. Once cut or prepared, all fruits and vegetables should be refrigerated promptly. After serving, refrigerate leftovers within two hours.
9. It is not necessary to wash ready-to-eat prewashed and packaged fresh-cut produce. If you choose to rewash this type of produce follow the instructions above. Always wash unpackaged prepared salad mixes under running water prior to consumption.



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