

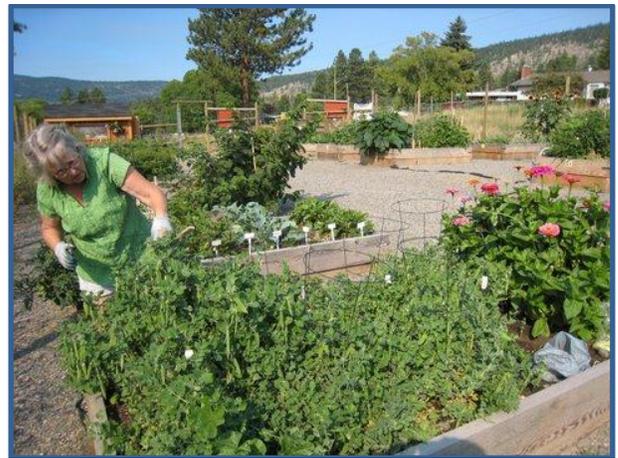
Store It!

A guide to storing fresh vegetables and fruit

During the summer, you may have extra produce (vegetables and fruit) from your garden or a community garden. Also, if prices are lower in the summer, you may want to buy extra from local stores and Farmers' Markets. "*Store It!*" will show you how to store vegetables and fruit to keep them fresh longer. If you use these tips, less of your food will go bad, and you will save money! When you eat more vegetables and fruit, you will be healthier.



Vegetables and fruit from Farmers' Markets



Vegetable and fruit from community gardens

A good tip is to freeze your summer vegetables and fruit soon after you pick or buy them. Then when you eat them in the winter, they will be nutritious, tasty, look good and be safe.

Did you know? The average family throws away about 30% of their produce. This is like throwing away money.

Store It! shows you:

- ✓ Whether to keep your produce on the counter or in the fridge
- ✓ How to store specific vegetables and fruit
- ✓ How to keep vegetables and fruit safe to eat
- ✓ Other resources, if you'd like to learn more

How to Store Your Fresh Vegetables and Fruit

There is a recommended way to store each kind of vegetable and fruit to keep them fresh as long as possible. The chart on the next page tells you which vegetables and fruit should be stored on your counter, or in your refrigerator. Follow the tips in each section for best results.

How to Store Produce on your Counter

- Out of direct sunlight
- In an open container, or open plastic bag, or cloth bag

Ethylene Gas

After some vegetables and fruit are picked, they give off a harmless type of gas that you cannot smell, called ethylene gas. This gas can make other vegetables and fruit ripen and spoil more quickly. This is why some fruits and vegetables should be stored separately from each other.

How to Store Produce in your Refrigerator

- Keep produce in a plastic bag, poked with holes, in the produce drawer of your refrigerator; or
- Pack vegetables loosely in your refrigerator so air can move around. If they are close together, they will spoil faster;
- Try to use all refrigerated vegetables and fruit within a few days. They slowly lose flavor and nutrients the longer they are stored.

If you have a Cold Storage or Root Cellar in your home:

Before refrigerators were common, most homes had root cellars. These were dry, cool (5° C to 10°C), dark and airy rooms in the lower level of the house. Vegetables such as potatoes, onions, carrots or squash could keep for several months in a root cellar. Basements, garages and cupboards in today's homes may be too warm, light or moist.

If you are fortunate to have a dark, cool area (5° C to 10°C) or root cellar in your house free of mice and pests, follow these tips:

- Check that the produce is firm and dry with no bruises or soft spots.
- Use heavy cardboard boxes that can be covered to keep light out. If the box does not have holes to let air in, poke some holes in the box to let air in.
- Place newspapers between and around produce to absorb moisture.
- Check the produce regularly and throw out any produce that is spoiled.
- Replace any soiled or soggy newsprint to prevent other produce from spoiling.

Share the cost of larger bags of produce with others and then divide the produce up between you. This way you have less to store.

Storing FRUITS and VEGETABLES

Keep high ethylene gas producers, in the blue boxes below, away from other fresh produce to slow down ripening/spoilage.

Refrigerator

Apples (>7days)

Figs

(Unwashed in a Single Layer)

Blackberries

Raspberries

Blueberries

Strawberries

(Unwashed in a Perforated Plastic Bag)

Broccoli

Green Onions ✓

Carrots

Lettuce ✓

Cauliflower

Peas

Corn

Radishes

(Wrap in paper towel in a Perforated Plastic Bag)

Mushrooms ✓

Artichokes

Kale

Asparagus ✓

Lima Beans

Beets

Leafy Vegetables

Brussels Sprouts

Leeks

Cabbage

Plums

Celery ✓

Spinach

Cherries

Sprouts

Grapes

Summer Squash

Green Beans

Yellow Squash

Herbs (not Basil)

Zucchini

Countertop

Apples (< 7 days)

Tomatoes ✓

Bananas ✓

Basil ✓

Limes

Cucumbers ✓

Mangoes

Eggplant

Oranges

Ginger

Peppers

Grapefruit

Pineapple

Lemons

Watermelon

Cool, Dry Place

Acorn Squash

Pumpkins

Butternut Squash

Spaghetti Squash

Garlic (in a paper bag)

Sweet Potatoes

Onions*

Winter Squash

Potatoes* (in a paper bag)

*Keep away from each other

Counter then Refrigerate

(Ripen on Counter, Then Refrigerate)

Apricots

Nectarines

Avocados

Plums

Cantaloupe

Pears

Honeydew

Peaches

Kiwi

✓ See Considerations for Specific Fruit and Vegetables

Storing FRUITS and VEGETABLES was adapted from www.sparklepeople.com

More about Ethylene Gas: All vegetables and fruit give off an odourless, harmless and tasteless gas called ethylene after they're picked. When high ethylene producing foods are kept close to produce sensitive to ethylene, especially in an enclosed space (like a bag or drawer), the gas will speed up the ripening process of the other produce. Use this to your advantage if you want to speed up the ripening process of an unripe fruit. For example, put an apple in a paper bag with an unripe avocado. But if you want your already-ripe foods to last longer, remember to keep them away from ethylene producing foods, as shown in the chart above.

Considerations for Specific Fruit and Vegetables

Tomatoes



Cold temperatures can change the taste and texture of your tomatoes. This is why it is best to store tomatoes on your counter.

Put tomatoes with stems up, in a shallow flat container lined with paper towel or on the counter. A flat cardboard box works well.

Keep them away from heat and direct sunlight.

Tomatoes can easily bruise and start to rot around the stem. Keep tomatoes in a single layer, and if possible, not touching

one another.

Do not store tomatoes in plastic bags. The trapped ethylene gas will make them ripen faster.

Over-ripe tomatoes should be put in the fridge, but let them come to room temperature before eating them. If you do not plan to eat an over-ripe tomato right away, pop them into the freezer.

Peel frozen tomatoes easily by placing them in warm water and rubbing their skins off with your hands. Add frozen tomatoes to soups, casseroles, sauces, and stews. The defrosted juice and seeds can be used in recipes requiring more liquid such as soup or spaghetti sauce.

Cucumbers

Cucumbers can get soft when stored in the fridge.

Remove store-bought English cucumbers from the plastic wrapping.

Wipe the skin, wrap cucumbers in a dry paper towel to absorb extra moisture and place in a perforated plastic bag.

Store cucumbers on your counter. Cucumbers spoil easily when they are near vegetables and fruit that give off ethylene gas, such as apples and cantaloupe. Once cut, place the bag in the fridge.



Leafy Greens



Do you have a hard time eating up all your lettuce or leafy greens in a day or two? If so, here are some ideas for storing your greens longer.

Remove any rotten leaves from the bunch.

Keep different kinds of lettuce in separate bags, if possible. Different kinds of lettuce bruise and spoil at different rates. Leaves going bad on one type of lettuce may cause other lettuce to spoil faster.

Do not wash your lettuce. If the leaves are wet, they will rot more quickly. Dry wet lettuce or lettuce leaves with a paper towel or lettuce spinner.

Wrap them in a dry paper towel, put them in a perforated plastic bag and keep them in your fridge.

If the greens have gone limp, refresh them in cold water and repeat steps 1 to 5.

Other vegetables that can be stored this way are green onions, celery, kale, spinach and herbs but not basil.



Bananas



Wrap the crown of bananas with plastic wrap and bananas will keep for 3-5 days longer.

Bananas produce more ethylene gas than any other fruit, **so keep them away from other fruits and vegetables on your counter.**

If bananas start getting over-ripe, you can refrigerate them. The skins will turn dark but the fruit inside will keep.

If ripe bananas get black and you don't want to eat them this way, peel and freeze whole in a freezer bag. Use frozen bananas in baking and smoothies.

Asparagus

Cut about 1 cm off the stems, place upright in water, cover with a plastic bag, and refrigerate.

They will stay crisp for a week or longer. You can also store herbs such as cilantro, sage, and parsley this way.



Onions

Check that onions are firm and dry with no mold.

Put onions into a mesh bag to keep the onion's skin dry. Another way to store onions is in clean pantyhose.

Tie a knot between each onion and hang in a cool dry place. Fewer molds spread this way because the onions do not touch each other.

Onions produce a gas that makes potatoes sprout, so keep onions away from potatoes.

Mushrooms



Choose mushrooms that are firm and closed under the cap. When you can see the brown ridges under the cap, it means the mushroom is older and will not stay fresh for long.

If you buy mushrooms in a plastic-wrapped box but you are not going to eat them right away, follow these steps:

1. Poke a hole in the plastic at one end of the container, no wider than $\frac{1}{2}$ centimeter, and
2. Store the unopened box in the refrigerator. The mushrooms will keep for a week or more in the original container.

Keep loose mushrooms unwashed in the fridge in a paper bag or wrapped in paper towels inside of a plastic bag. The paper bag, or paper towels, will absorb excess moisture while the plastic bag will keep the mushrooms from drying out. When you first put mushrooms in the fridge, they may give off a lot of moisture. If the paper bag or paper towels become wet, replace with another dry paper bag or paper towel.

Wash and dry mushrooms only before cooking.

Basil Herb



Unlike other herbs, basil keeps well at room temperature, rather than in the fridge. Place a bunch, standing upright, in a container with water and cover loosely with a plastic bag. Change water every day or two.

Herbs with woodier stems such as oregano, rosemary or thyme, can be bunched together with the stems tied and placed upside down to dry.

For more information on drying please refer to the Interior Health publication *Dry it!* found at:

<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/InfantsChildren/Documents/Dry%20It%20Manual.pdf>

Keep Food Safe

To prevent the growth of harmful germs on your vegetables and fruits, follow these simple steps:

1. **Wash your hands** with hot soapy water, before and after handling vegetables and fruit. Make sure your work area, towels, sponges, dish clothes, knives, counters and cutting boards are clean. Knives, cutlery, counters and cutting boards can be further “sanitized” by spraying a mixture made by adding 5 ml household bleach to 1 litre of water. Let the spray sit for 2 minutes before wiping off. Sanitizing will bring down the number of germs that may be on the surface
2. In your grocery cart and at home, keep your vegetables and fruit separate from raw uncooked meat, poultry, and seafood. This prevents **cross-contamination**.
3. Some fruits and vegetables are more susceptible to being contaminated with germs. Usually this happens because the produce has been washed in dirty water in the factory or in the field. Cut out damaged (bruised, discolored) areas before eating.
4. Wash vegetables and fruit under cold **running** water. Do not soak them in water, as this gives germs a chance to go from one vegetable or fruit to another. Scrub vegetables or fruit with a thick rind, for example, melons, field cucumbers, and squash with a clean vegetable brush.
5. Dry the washed produce with clean paper towels.
6. If you leave cut vegetables and fruits sitting on your counter for more than two hours, bacteria on the produce may grow in number to dangerous levels. Put cut vegetables and fruit in the fridge, and take them out when you are ready to eat them.
7. You do not need to wash ready-to-eat prewashed and packaged fresh-cut produce. If you want to rewash, wash produce under cold running water before eating.
8. Use clean containers and new, clean and dry plastic bags.
9. Check stored produce during the week and throw away any spoiled pieces. Remember, if a spoiled fruit or vegetable has gone bad, it can cause another piece sitting next to it to also go bad.

Resources

1. The Canadian Produce Manufacturers Association has much more storage information for lots of other vegetables and fruit: <http://www.cpma.ca/Files/CPMA.HomeStorageGuide.English.pdf> and guides for freezing vegetables and fruit: <http://www.cpma.ca/en/fruits-and-vegetables/UsingFruitsAndVegetables/FreezingFruitsAndVegetables.aspx>
2. Food safety for fruits and vegetables in different languages: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile59b.stm>
3. These videos show simple steps to store fresh vegetables and fruit and freeze food. <http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Videos/Kitchen-Tips-and-Food-Handling.aspx>