

Keeping Produce Fresh

Approximately 30 per cent of produce is discarded after purchase because of spoilage. That is a large waste of money. Contrary to popular belief, many fruits and vegetables should not be stored in the refrigerator in sealed bags. This is because some fruits, like apples, emit ethylene gas which promotes ripening and many leafy greens need to breathe in order to stay moist.

Taking the time to store produce properly can keep vegetables and fruits perky for a lot longer. Here are a few of my favourite tips.

Check the settings in your fruit or vegetable bins to see if they are set to high or low for moisture. High moisture helps leafy things like chard, lettuces, or bok choy and root or thick skinned vegetables such as potatoes or melons prefer low moisture.

Greens can be washed, spun dry, and wrapped in a paper towel and placed loosely in a plastic bag. Leafy greens, celery, green onions, and herbs can be placed upright in containers with a bit of water and loosely covered with a plastic bag. Most other vegetables and fruit should not be washed until just before being served.

Avoid storing onions with potatoes. Onions emit a gas that can cause potatoes to sprout. Keep onions and potatoes away from each other and store each in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place.

Fruit and vegetables with thicker skin or rinds should be stored in cool, preferably dark places (7-10 degrees). Most homes today do not have a place that is in this temperature range so you are very lucky if you have an old fashioned root cellar. If you do not have a root cellar, there are some specialty products you can use such as vegetable storage bags specially designed to let gas out and keep moisture in.

Check stored produce regularly to see if anything is beginning to spoil. Discard spoiling produce right away to prevent it from spreading to other produce.

Some produce departments have manuals available that describe differing preparation and storage of produce. Check with your store's produce manager.

Buying in bulk may seem like a bargain, but if the produce spoils then the savings are gone. Ask friends or family if they want to split that 10 kg bag of onions. Forming a buying group in the fall can mean big savings if you can share and store case lots.

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