

# Keeping Fruits and Vegetables Fresh

Bringing home fruits and vegetables is the first step to eating enough of them. But keeping them fresh until you can eat them isn't always easy. This handout can help you remember how to keep fruits and vegetables fresher for a longer time. Keep it handy so you do not forget.



## Bring them home quickly

When you buy fruits and vegetables, get them home as soon as possible.

- **When shopping,** make the grocery store your last stop so fresh foods won't warm up in your car. At farmers markets, arrive soon after they open, so your food won't be warming in the sun.
- **Keep an insulated bag or a cooler in the car** to help keep fruits and vegetables cool.
- **Do not buy more than you can eat.** Fresh food looks so good that it is tempting to buy a lot. Be realistic about what you can really eat before it spoils. Plan meals around your purchases.

## Separate foods

- **Always keep fruits and vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood** in the grocery cart, grocery bags, and the refrigerator.
- **Store ethylene-producing vegetables separately.** Ethylene [EHT-eh-leen] is a colorless, odorless gas that speeds ripening. Foods that give off a lot of it make nearby foods decay faster, especially if they're together in a bag, bowl, or drawer. So, if you put lettuce in the same bag or drawer as apples, the lettuce will go bad much faster. On the other hand, if you need your peaches to ripen faster, put them in a bag with an apple! See page 2 for more details.
- **In the refrigerator, keep fruits and vegetables in bags.** Use plastic bags that are perforated (have small holes), or buy special "green" produce bags. These keep in moisture but also allow some airflow.

## Washing and cutting

- **Wash fruits and most vegetables right before you eat them.** Washing removes some of their natural preservatives, so they'll store longer if they are not washed. Packaged fruits and vegetables labeled "ready to eat" or "washed" should not need to be washed again.
- **Once fruits and vegetables have been cut, peeled, or cooked, refrigerate within 2 hours.** As soon as you cut into the food, germs can grow.
  - **Foods most likely to become unsafe** after being cut are melons, tomatoes, and leafy greens.
  - **If you like "ready to eat" fruits and vegetables,** keep them refrigerated. Be sure to only buy or prepare what you can eat in a few days.

## Eat it, cook it, or freeze it

- **Eat the most perishable foods first.** For example, eat the berries will go bad before oranges, so eat the berries first.
- **If you have more than you can eat, cook it or freeze it.** If you find yourself with a bunch of fresh foods and you're about to go out of town:
  - Use extra vegetables to make a pot of soup or a casserole.
  - Use extra fruit to make a pie or cobbler. Berries can be frozen for smoothies
  - Cut up any fruits or vegetables, spread them on a tray, and freeze them. Then place in a plastic bag.

# Keeping fruits and vegetables fresh

We recommend posting this guide on your fridge.

## Refrigerator



### Fruits

\* Apples (more than 7 days) Figs  
Apricots Honeydew  
Cantaloupe

Cherries Grapes  
– Any fruit that's already cut up

### Store unwashed in a single layer:

Blackberries Raspberries  
Blueberries Strawberries

### Vegetables



#### Store unwashed in separate, perforated, plastic bags:

Broccoli Green Onions  
Carrots Lettuce  
Cauliflower Peas  
Corn Radishes

#### Store in a paper bag:

Mushrooms Okra

Artichokes Lima beans  
Asparagus Leafy vegetables  
Beets Leeks  
Brussel sprouts Spinach  
Cabbage Sprouts  
Celery Summer squash  
Green beans Zucchini  
Herbs (not basil)  
– Any fruit that's already cut up

## Counter top

(Away from direct sunlight)



### Whole fruits

\* Apples (less than 7 days) Bananas

Grapefruit Persimmons  
Lemons Pineapple  
Limes Plantains  
Mangoes Pomegranates  
Oranges Watermelon  
Papayas

### Vegetables and herbs

Basil Ginger  
Cucumbers Jicama  
Eggplant Peppers

\* Tomatoes

## On the counter until ripe, then in the fridge



\* Avocados Pears  
Nectarines Plums  
Peaches

Kiwi

## In a cool, dry place



Acorn squash Pumpkins  
Butternut squash Spaghetti squash  
Garlic Sweet potatoes  
Onions Winter squash  
Potatoes  
– Store onions and potatoes separate from each other

\* These foods give off a lot of ethylene.

Keep them away from other fresh produce to slow ripening and spoiling.

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