Keeping Fruits & 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. In fact, Americans throw out about one-fourth of the fruits and vegetables we bring home! Post this handout on your fridge to help you remember how to make fruits and vegetables last longer.

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 fruits and vegetables won’t be warming up in your car as long. At farmers markets, arrive soon after they open, so your food won’t be warming in the sun all morning.

• Keep an insulated bag in the car during warm months so you can keep your fruits and vegetables cool.

• Don’t buy more than you can eat. Fresh food looks so good that it’s tempting to buy a lot. Be realistic about what you can really eat before it spoils.

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 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 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 last longer if they’re not washed. Packaged fruits and vegetables labeled “ready to eat” or “washed” don’t 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 faster.
  – Foods most likely to become unsafe when cut up are melons, tomatoes, and leafy greens.
  – If you want cut up your fruits and vegetables so they’re ready to eat — which is a great way to help you eat more of them — keep them refrigerated. And be sure to not buy or prepare more than 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 before the oranges.

• 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 tomato sauce.
  – Use extra fruit to make a pie or cobbler.
  – Cut up any fruits or vegetables (except leafy greens), spread them on a tray, and freeze them. Then transfer to a plastic bag.
Keeping fruits & vegetables fresh

Post this guide on your fridge

Refrigerator

**Fruits**

- Apples (more than 7 days)
- Apricots
- Cantaloupe

- Cherries
- Grapes
- any fruit that’s already cut up

**Store unwashed in a single layer:**

- Blackberries
- Blueberries

**Vegetables**

- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Beets
- Brussel sprouts
- Cabbage
- Celery
- Green beans
- Herbs (not basil)

- Store unwashed in separate, perforated, plastic bags:
  - Broccoli
  - Carrots
  - Cauliflower
  - Corn
  - Corn (not basil)

- Store in a paper bag:
  - Mushrooms
  - Okra

- Lima beans
- Leafy vegetables
- Leeks
- Spinach
- Sprouts
- Summer squash
- Zucchini

Counter top (away from direct sunlight)

**Fruits**

- Apples (less than 7 days)
- Bananas
- Grapefruit
- Lemons
- Limes
- Mangoes
- Oranges
- Papayas
- Persimmons
- Pineapples
- Plantains
- Pomegranates
- Watermelon

**Vegetables**

- Basil
- Cucumbers
- Eggplant

- Ginger
- Jicama
- Peppers
- Tomatoes

On the counter until ripe, then in the fridge

- Avocados
- Pears
- Kiwi

- Nectarines
- Plums
- Peaches

- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Beets
- Brussel sprouts
- Cabbage
- Celery
- Green beans
- Herbs (not basil)

- Store unwashed in separate, perforated, plastic bags:
  - Broccoli
  - Carrots
  - Cauliflower
  - Corn

- Store in a paper bag:
  - Mushrooms
  - Okra

- Lima beans
- Leafy vegetables
- Leeks
- Spinach
- Sprouts
- Summer squash
- Zucchini

- Blackberries
- Raspberries
- Figs

- Apricots
- Honeydew
- Cantaloupe

- Cherries
- Grapes
- any fruit that’s already cut up

In a cool, dry place

- Acorn squash
- Butternut squash
- Garlic
- Onions
- Potatoes

- Pumpkins
- Spaghetti squash
- Sweet potatoes
- Winter squash

(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.