

Handling Produce Safely

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When You Shop

- Choose undamaged fruits and vegetables. Avoid produce that is cut or bruised.
- Separate produce from meats in your shopping cart. Meat juices may contain bacteria. These bacteria are harmless after meat is cooked but may cause problems on raw produce.

- Some fruits give off a gas during ripening called ethylene. Exposure to ethylene can lower the quality of some fruits, vegetables and leafy greens. For example, it can cause yellowing of green vegetables and bitterness in carrots. This does not make the produce unsafe, just lower in quality.

For best quality, store ethylene-sensitive items separately from ethylene-generating ones. A good rule of thumb is to store vegetables and leafy items separately from fruit.

When You Store

- Store fresh produce properly for highest quality and safety.

Produce	Recommended Storage
Citrus fruits	Store all, except tangerines, in the refrigerator uncovered. Store tangerines in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.
Stonefruits like peaches and apricots	If not fully ripe, hold at room temperature a day or two. When ripe (firm yet will yield to gentle pressure), store in the refrigerator. Use within 3 to 5 days.
Melons	Place ripened melons in a plastic bag to protect other foods from melon odors. Store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.
Bananas	Allow to ripen at room temperature. After ripening, bananas will keep longest in the refrigerator. The cold temperature will cause the skin to darken but the fruit will keep longer.
Vegetables	Most vegetables keep best in the crisper section of the refrigerator. Exceptions are identified below.
Dry onions	Store in loosely woven or open mesh bags at room temperature or slightly cooler temperatures.
Potatoes	Keep in a dark, dry, well-ventilated place at temperatures between 45°F and 50°F.
Hard-rind squash, eggplant, rutabagas and sweet potatoes	Store at 55°F to 60°F for up to 1 month. Do not refrigerate since lower temperatures may cause chilling injury. If these vegetables are kept at room temperature, plan to use them within 1 week.

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Ethylene-Sensitive Produce		Ethylene-Generating Produce		
Carrot	Spinach	Banana	Kiwi	Apricot
Asparagus	Leafy herbs	Mango	Peach	Cantaloupe
Iceberg lettuce	Cucumber	Apple	Plum	Nectarine
Broccoli		Avocado	Honeydew melon	Pear
			Tomato	

When You Prepare

- ✿ Wash hands in hot, soapy water:
 - ✓ before handling food.
 - ✓ after using the bathroom.
 - ✓ after changing diapers or helping a child use the bathroom.
 - ✓ after touching hair or face, blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing.
 - ✓ if you come in contact with juices from raw meat, poultry or fish.
 - ✓ after tending to someone sick or injured.
 - ✓ after handling pets.

To wash hands, follow the steps in the box below.



- ✿ Bacteria can live on kitchen towels and sponges. Wash towels often. Replace sponges every few weeks.
- ✿ Wash all fresh produce in cool, running water, even those with hard shells like melons and winter squash. Do not allow produce to soak in standing water and **DO NOT USE SOAP**. If fruits and vegetables are very dirty, use a vegetable brush to scrub the surface. Carefully clean around stems and crevices. If desired, peel after washing.
- ✿ Use plastic cutting boards rather than wood. Bacteria can hide in the grooves of wood and are difficult to get out. Never cut produce on a cutting board used for meat, poultry or fish until the board is washed thoroughly in hot, soapy water.
- ✿ To prevent fruits like apples and peaches from turning dark when cut, sprinkle with lemon juice or ascorbic acid.

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When You're Cooking

Unlike most animal products, fruits and many vegetables are frequently eaten raw. However, cooking is often used to soften the tissue making it easier to digest and allowing use in a wider variety of ways.

- ✿ The length of time required to cook a given fruit or vegetable differs with the product, its variety and maturity, the temperature of the product when heating begins and the size of the pieces being cooked. Meat, poultry and fish must be thoroughly cooked to assure safety, but length of cooking time for most fruits and vegetables is a matter of personal taste not safety.
- ✿ When cooking ahead, divide large portions into small, shallow containers. This ensures safe, rapid cooling.

When You Serve

- ✿ Keep cooked fruits and vegetables at room temperature for no longer than 2 hours. Microorganisms that cause spoilage and may lead to foodborne illness grow rapidly at warmer temperatures.
- ✿ Fruits and vegetables make delicious party food. If used as part of a cold dish, keep the dish on ice. If produce is made into a hot item, keep it hot using a hot plate, chafing dish or other heat source. If no heat source is available, serve only a small amount at a time and replace the serving dish as the food cools. Do not add new, hot food to a cooling dish on the serving table. If serving fresh produce with a dip, keep the dip at the appropriate serving temperature.

When In Doubt, Throw It Out

Sometimes produce is forgotten in the refrigerator.

- ✿ **Never taste any fruit, vegetable or product containing produce that looks or smells strange. Just discard it.**
- ✿ If you find mold on the surface of firm fruits and vegetables and can cut it away along with at least an inch around the mold, it is acceptable to use the product. However, mold can form poisons that are found under the surface and that can soak into soft products. This means most moldy fruits and vegetables should be thrown away.

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