

Your Questions Answered

Q: My family doesn't like vegetables. How can I make them more exciting?

A: Vegetables come in many different colors, shapes, sizes, and flavors. With such a variety, there are likely to be some that your family will enjoy. Introduce new varieties on a regular basis.

Involve your family in the process. Plan a family outing to your local farmer's market. Allow children to pick out a new vegetable for the family to try. Have them help prepare and cook. Plant a small garden or volunteer to pick vegetables at a nearby farm or community garden.

When preparing vegetables, bring out different flavors by adding spices, herbs, or flavored vinegars. Try garnishing dishes with onions, garlic, salsa, or other vegetables.

Most importantly, keep trying. Vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals and an important part of a healthy diet.*

* A healthy diet also includes fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk products, lean meats (including poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts) and is low in saturated fats, *trans* fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars. A healthy diet also means staying within your daily calorie needs.

Q: Help! Fresh fruits and vegetables go bad before I can use them. What can I do to minimize waste?

A: Try to purchase only the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables you will eat in the next few days. Remember that fruits and vegetables come in forms, including frozen, canned, or dried, which last longer.

Properly storing fruits and vegetables can also help minimize spoilage. *See reverse side for storage tips.*

Here are some ways to use fresh fruits and vegetables before they spoil:

- Steam fresh vegetables. Allow them to cool and then place in air-tight containers and freeze. Use later in soups, casseroles, or re-heat for quick side dishes.
- Mash ripe bananas and freeze in 1/4 cup servings. Use for smoothies or homemade whole-grain breads.
- Squeeze the juice of oranges, grapefruit, lemons, or limes in a bowl. Mix with water and pour in ice trays. Freeze for flavorful ice cubes that add a fresh citrus essence to water or tea.
- Be creative. Add different fruits and vegetables to your favorite dishes to create new flavor twists.

Q: How can I be sure that fruits and vegetables are free of contaminants?

A: Although there is no way to be absolutely certain that any food is free of contaminants, one of the best ways to reduce the risk of illness is to wash all fruits and vegetables, before preparing or eating.

Follow these simple steps:

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go to the next food.
- Rinse produce under clean running water. Do not use detergents or bleach as these products are not intended for consumption.

Q: Which cooking method is best for retaining the nutrients in fruits and vegetables?

A: There is no one right way to cook a particular food, and no matter how careful you are, food preparation of any kind results in some nutrient loss. However, certain techniques can help you minimize nutrients lost. Try these methods next time you cook fruits or vegetables.

- Use a steamer or cook in small amounts of water. If possible, use the leftover cooking liquid in a soup or another dish.
- Cook fruits and vegetables “just until tender” and avoid overcooking.
- Cut and cook fruits and vegetables in pieces that are as large as possible to reduce exposure to air that destroys some vitamins.
- Cook fruits and vegetables as soon as possible after cutting.
- Prepare fruits and vegetables as close to serving time as possible.

Storing Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Apples: Refrigerate to prevent further ripening. Apples can keep for up to six weeks. Check apples often, and remove any apples that begin to decay, or the others will do the same.

Bananas: Keep at room temperature to further ripen. Once ripe, store in refrigerator for up to 3 to 5 days. Although the peel will turn dark brown, the fruit is good.

Bell Peppers: Store unwashed bell peppers in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Peppers should stay fresh for about a week.

Broccoli: Store broccoli unwashed in an open plastic bag and place in refrigerator crisper. Use within a day or two after purchasing.

Carrots: Refrigerate carrots in the crisper section. Carrots should last several weeks.

Corn: Cook corn shortly after purchase for the best taste. If not, store in the refrigerator. Keep it in its husk until you are ready to cook it. For best flavor, eat within a couple of days.

Garlic: Store garlic bulb in a cool, dark place with low humidity out of the refrigerator. Garlic should last for several weeks.

Lemons: Store at room temperature or in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Lemons should keep for about two weeks at room temperature or six weeks in the refrigerator. Cut lemons should be refrigerated and used as quickly as possible.

Lettuce: Keep unwashed lettuce in plastic bags in the crisper section of the refrigerator. Salad greens should be stored separately from fruits. Lettuce can last up to two weeks.

Mangos: Store mangos at room temperature and out of sun. The ideal temperature for mangos is 55°F. Mangos should have a shelf life of one to two weeks. Store cut mangos in plastic bag for no more than three days.

Onions: Store in a cool, dry, open space away from bright light. Because onions absorb moisture, do not store onions below the sink. Do not place onions near potatoes because potatoes give off moisture. Depending on the season, onions may last two to four weeks.

Oranges: Keep oranges at room temperature or in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Oranges will generally keep for up to two weeks.

Potatoes: Store in a cool, dry place. Sunlight can cause the skin of brown potatoes to turn green. Remove any green spots before using. Potatoes will keep for three to five weeks.

Spinach: Pack unwashed spinach lightly in a cellophane or plastic bag, and store in the refrigerator crisper. Spinach should be eaten within three to four days.

Squash: Place summer squash in plastic bags and store in the refrigerator. Squash should keep for about a week. Winter squash has a longer shelf life and may be stored in a cool, dry place for up to three months.

Tomatoes: Store at room temperature away from sunlight until fully ripened. Ripe tomatoes may be stored in the refrigerator and used within a week.

General Storing Tip: For fruits and vegetables that require refrigeration, store the fruits and vegetables in separate crisper sections to prevent exposure to ethylene gas, which is produced by some fruits, and decreases the storage life of certain vegetables.

For more answers to common questions, visit www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov.

