

# Produce Storage Guide



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# Keep Your Produce Fresher, Longer

Just as people breathe, produce respires. It takes in oxygen and produces carbon dioxide. This process, called oxidation, is responsible for the breakdown (spoilage) of fruits and vegetables after harvest. You can't stop this natural process, but you can learn how to slow it down and lengthen the life of your produce with the simple tips for storing produce offered in this guide.

## Keep It Cold

The warmer the temperature, the faster the rate of respiration. In most cases, keeping produce at a temperature just above freezing is best to slow that process, but consult the storage recommendations for individual items in this guide for more detailed information.

## Keep It Low

Avoid stacking. Air circulation and the absence of pressure prolong produce life.

## Keep It Dirty

Wash your produce just before you use it, not before you store it. Water can cause damage. Some types of produce are often misted with water while on display in the store, but this is a tradeoff. Vegetables like it humid, and forced-air refrigeration dries them out quickly, making spraying necessary. When you get your produce home, pat wet items dry with a towel. If there's dirt, leave it until you're ready to prepare or eat the produce.

## Keep It Whole

Broken stems, pierced skin and exposed surfaces allow microorganisms access. Keep produce close to its original state until you're ready to prepare or eat it.

## Keep It Breathing

You want to slow respiration, not stop it. Whether refrigerating or ripening at room temperature, avoid sealing fruits and vegetables in airtight containers or bags. The produce may suffocate and accelerate spoilage.

## Eat It Quickly

Don't keep it long. Fruits and vegetables lose flavor at low temperatures. Refrigeration dehydrates and saps sugar from produce. So plan ahead to buy what you need, and prioritize to use what you buy.

# Ripeness Guide: What to Eat First

Items	Eat Now	Eat Soon	Eat Later	Keep
Apples				●
Apricots			●	
Artichokes	●			
Arugula		●		
Asparagus	●			
Basil	●			
Beets				●
Bell Peppers			●	
Berries	●			
Blueberries			●	
Broccoli	●			
Brussels Sprouts			●	
Cabbage				●
Carrots				●
Cauliflower			●	
Celery			●	
Cherries	●			
Corn	●			
Cucumbers		●		
Dill	●			
Eggplant		●		
Garlic				●
Grapefruit			●	
Grapes		●		
Green Beans	●			

Items	Eat Now	Eat Soon	Eat Later	Keep
Leeks			●	
Lemons			●	
Lettuce		●		
Limes		●		
Mint			●	
Mushrooms	●			
Mustard Greens	●			
Onions				●
Oranges			●	
Oregano			●	
Parsley			●	
Peaches			●	
Pears			●	
Pineapple		●		
Plums			●	
Potatoes				●
Salad Mix		●		
Spinach			●	
Sprouts	●			
Tomatoes			●	
Watercress	●			
Watermelon			●	
Winter Squash				●
Zucchini		●		

*This chart is a general guide. Ripeness upon purchase is the determining factor for when to eat any produce item.*

# Basic Storage Guidelines

Keep any of this ethylene emitting produce	Away from any of this ethylene sensitive produce
Apples	Beets
Avocados	Broccoli
Bananas	Brussels Sprouts
Figs	Cabbage
Melons (uncut)	Carrots
Nectarines	Cauliflower
Peaches	Cucumbers
Pears	Eggplant
Plums	Leafy Greens
Tomatoes	Parsley
	Peas
	Peppers

## Why keep these fruits and veggies separate?

Many fruits emit ethylene, an odorless, colorless gas as they ripen. This gas will speed the ripening of nearby ethylene-sensitive vegetables, leading to premature spoilage. It is best to avoid storing fruits and vegetables near one another. Separate them from each other in your refrigerator and on your countertop.

Ethylene is not all bad, however. You can use it to control the speed at which your fruit ripens. Ethylene-producing fruits can be stored near other fruits to ripen them faster, or kept apart from them to reduce ripening speed. Examples include placing a ripe banana in a paper bag with unripe peaches, or storing an apple in a bag with a green avocado.

## Storage A-Z: Veggies, Fruits & Roots

There is often more than one way to store fresh produce, this guide lists common methods. Plastic bags are recommended throughout this guide as they are commonly available in most produce departments. If you wish to avoid using plastic, you can use a clean dish towel as a reasonable substitute for a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Paper bags should only be used where noted as they can have a dehydrating effect on some produce.

**Apples** will store for months with proper refrigeration. Sweet apples store less well than tart varieties because their higher sugar content causes their texture to deteriorate faster. Freshly picked apples can be stored for a short time out of refrigeration, but will spoil faster than if they are kept cool.

**Apricots** see *Stone Fruit* on page 12.

**Arugula** see *Salad Greens* on page 12.

**Asparagus** should be trimmed approximately ½ inch from the bottom, and then stored upright in a glass or bowl filled with enough water to cover stems, as you would do with flowers in a vase. Keep refrigerated.

**Avocados** should only be refrigerated when completely ripe, or after they have been cut. Ripen hard avocados on the countertop in a paper bag for approximately five days; add a ripe banana or apple to the bag to hasten ripening. To store half an avocado, leave the pit in the unused half, cover loosely with plastic wrap and refrigerate. Eat within two days. Surface browning is natural and can be eaten or removed when ready to use.





**Bananas** see *Tropical Fruit* on page 13.

**Basil** is highly perishable and should be used as soon as possible to avoid spoilage. The ideal storage temperature is 53°F, basil blackens when cold and wilts if too warm. For best results, trim ends and store upright in a glass of water on the counter, tops covered loosely by a plastic bag. Unused basil can be pureed with a little water and frozen in ice cube trays to preserve for future use.

**Beans** should be wrapped in a dry paper towel and packed loosely in a plastic or paper bag and stored in your refrigerator.

**Beets** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Berries** should always be refrigerated in the coolest part of your refrigerator. Do not rinse until just before using.

**Bok Choy** see *Cooking Greens* on page 7.

**Broccoli** will keep 3-5 days or longer if wrapped in a dry paper towel and stored in an open plastic bag in your crisper drawer.

**Cabbage** should be wrapped loosely in a paper towel and stored in an open plastic bag in your refrigerator crisper. Cabbage will keep for a long time, just remove outer leaves before use if shriveled or damaged.

**Carrots** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Cauliflower** will keep 3-5 days or longer if wrapped in a dry paper towel and stored in an open plastic bag in your refrigerator crisper.

**Celeriac** or **Celery Root** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.



**Celery** is often purchased in a plastic sleeve. If using within 7-10 days, store in original sleeve in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator. If storing longer, remove from plastic, dry and wrap in a paper towel. Rehydrate celery before using if it has lost moisture.

**Chard** see *Cooking Greens* on page 7.

**Cherries** see *Stone Fruit* on page 12.

**Cilantro** should be trimmed ¼ inch and stored upright in a glass of water in your refrigerator.

**Citrus** fruit should be stored on the countertop away from light if it will be used in 3-5 days. If storing longer, fruit should be refrigerated to prevent spoilage.

**Coconuts** see *Tropical Fruit* on page 13.

**Collard Greens** see *Cooking Greens* on page 7.

**Cooking Greens** like collards, bok choy and mustards, should be wrapped in a dry paper towel inside a loose plastic bag and stored in the crisper of your refrigerator. Wilted greens can be rehydrated by trimming the ends and soaking in lukewarm water for 10-15 minutes.

**Corn** should be stored in its husk in an open container or on a shelf in your refrigerator. If already husked, wrap corn loosely in a paper towel and store in an open plastic bag.





**Cucumbers** are highly sensitive to ethylene (page 4). They should not be stored with ethylene producing produce in the refrigerator. Wrap loosely in a paper towel and keep in a crisper drawer with other vegetables, away from fruits like apples. A cut cucumber can be wrapped in plastic or kept in a closed container for 2-3 days refrigerated.

**Dates** will keep for a long time if refrigerated. They can be stored outside of refrigeration but will develop crystallized date sugar underneath their skins. This is normal but changes the texture.

**Eggplant** should be stored in a cool, dry place with circulating air, such as a countertop. Do not refrigerate unless cut. Cut eggplant will brown slightly, but is OK to eat within 1-2 days.

**Fennel** should be trimmed into two parts: the bulb and the fronds. If using the fronds, store upright in water in the refrigerator as a fresh herb. Store the bulb wrapped in a paper towel inside a loose plastic bag. Fennel bulb can be rehydrated like celery: trim and soak in lukewarm water for 10-15 minutes until firm.

**Figs** are highly perishable and should be refrigerated at all times. When ready to eat, bring up to room temperature on the counter for 10-15 minutes for best flavor.

**Garlic** see *Onions and Garlic* on page 10.

**Ginger** should be refrigerated in a plastic bag with a paper towel inserted to absorb moisture.

**Grapes** should be refrigerated in a loose plastic bag, with a paper towel inserted to absorb moisture.

**Green Onions** or **Scallions** should be refrigerated in an open plastic bag with a paper towel inserted to absorb moisture.

**Guava** see *Tropical Fruit* on page 13.

**Horseradish** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Jicama** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Kale** should be wrapped in a dry paper towel and stored in a loose plastic bag in the crisper of your refrigerator.

**Kiwi** see *Tropical Fruit* on page 13.

**Kohlrabi** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Lettuce** see *Salad Greens* on page 12.

**Mangos** see *Tropical Fruit* on page 13.

**Melons** should not be refrigerated unless they are fully ripe, have been cut, or will be served chilled. Store cut melons cut-side down on a plate in the fridge, or with cut side wrapped loosely in plastic wrap to prevent dehydration.

**Mushrooms** should be refrigerated and kept dry in a paper bag. If you purchase them in a closed container, puncture the plastic well to allow for air flow. Wet mushrooms can grow dangerous bacteria.

**Mustard Greens** see *Cooking Greens* on page 7.

**Napa Cabbage** see *Cooking Greens* on page 7.





**Okra** should be wrapped in a paper towel and stored in a loose paper or plastic bag in the refrigerator.

**Onions** and **Garlic** can be stored for months in a cool, dry, dark place with some air flow. Separate them so their flavors are not compromised by one another. If they sprout, remove green shoots and use remaining portion.

**Papaya** see *Tropical Fruit* on page 13.

**Parsley** should be trimmed and stored upright in a glass of water in your refrigerator.

**Parsnips** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Peaches** see *Stone Fruit* on page 12.

**Pears** should not be refrigerated unless they are fully ripe or have been cut. Store pears on the counter at room temperature until fragrant and softening. You can speed ripening by storing in a closed paper bag with a ripe banana (see ethylene-emitting fruits on page 4).

**Peas** should be wrapped in a dry paper towel and stored in a loose paper or plastic bag in your refrigerator.

**Peppers** are ethylene-emitting fruits (see page 4) and should not be stored with other vegetables in your refrigerator. Store them in a plastic bag with a paper towel inside in a separate part of your refrigerator.

**Pineapple** see *Tropical Fruit* on page 13.

**Plums** see *Stone Fruit* on page 12.

**Pluots** see *Stone Fruit* on page 12.

**Pomegranates** can be stored on the countertop or in the refrigerator. If stored in the refrigerator, keep wrapped in a paper towel to prevent spoilage. Pomegranates will keep for a long time and are often edible even if the exterior is hard and dry.

**Potatoes** should be stored in a cool, dry, dark cabinet with some air flow. Although potatoes will naturally sprout over time, you can remove the sprouts and use the potato. Do not expose potatoes to light as they develop a slightly toxic compound known as solanine. This is seen as a green tint on the exterior of the potato.

**Radishes** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Rapini** or **Broccoli Rabe** see *Cooking Greens* on page 7.

**Rhubarb** should be wrapped in a dry paper towel and stored in a loose paper or plastic bag in your refrigerator.

**Romanesco** see *Cauliflower* on page 6.

**Root Vegetables** will keep for months in your refrigerator's crisper drawer. Store them in a loose, open plastic bag with a damp (not wet) paper towel inside to maintain humidity. Always remove the greens from root vegetables before storing to prevent dehydration of the root. If roots are soft or dehydrated, trim ends and soak in lukewarm water for 10-15 minutes before using.

**Rutabaga** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.





**Salad Greens** should be stored dry in your crisper in a loosely fitting plastic bag. You can insert a dry paper towel to absorb moisture, but it may dehydrate the greens if kept more than 2-3 days. Trim and soak greens in lukewarm water for 10-15 minutes to rehydrate, pat or spin dry and return to the refrigerator to crisp before using.

**Salad Mix** or **Spring Mix** or **Mesclun** is highly perishable and should be used quickly after purchasing. Store in a sturdy, closed container or plastic bag accompanied by a dry paper towel to soak up moisture.

**Spinach** see *Salad Greens* on page 12.

**Stone Fruit** should be stored on your counter until fully ripe. Never refrigerate unripe stone fruit, as it can produce a “mealy” texture. To speed ripening, store stone fruit in a closed paper bag with a ripe banana (see ethylene-emitting fruits, page 4). Once ripe, stone fruit can be refrigerated for a day or two but quality will deteriorate. Cherries are an exception: always keep refrigerated in a loose plastic bag.

**Summer Squash** see *Zucchini* on page 13.

**Sunchokes** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Tomatoes** should be stored on the counter until fully ripe and soft. Tomatoes ripen fastest in a sunny window or when stored in a paper bag with other ethylene-emitting fruits (see page 4). Once ripe or cut, tomatoes should be refrigerated until eaten.

**Tropical Fruit** should never be refrigerated unless it is fully ripe or has been cut. Store tropical fruit on the counter at room temperature until fragrant and ripe. Many kinds of tropical fruit emit ethylene (see page 4) and will ripen surrounding fruits quickly.

**Turnips** see *Root Vegetables* on page 11.

**Watercress** see *Salad Greens* on page 12.

**Winter Squash** should be stored in a cool, dry, dark place with some air flow. Stored properly, winter squash can keep for over a year. Refrigerate cut squash cut-side down on a plate or loosely covered in plastic wrap for 7-10 days.

**Zucchini** are ethylene-emitting fruits (see page 4) and should not be stored with other vegetables. Wrap zucchini in a dry paper towel and store in a loose plastic or paper bag in the refrigerator away from other vegetables.



