

Safe Storage of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

—Amanda Scott*

To make sure that your fresh fruits and vegetables stay safe to eat, it is important to store them properly. Safe storage can help you prevent foodborne illness and keep healthy.

Fresh fruits and vegetables should be stored unwashed. In fact, it is best to wash fruits and vegetables just before they are eaten or prepared. This will help prevent spoilage and mold growth during storage.

However, some fruits and vegetables may be very dirty after harvest. If so, rinse and dry them well before storing and be sure to wash them properly before they are eaten or prepared.

If you buy pre-cut fruits and vegetables, refrigerate them immediately. Store them in the refrigerator crisper in sealed packages, plastic bags or clean, air-tight containers.

For whole fruits and vegetables that are recommended for refrigerator storage, perforated plastic bags work well. Store those fruits and vegetables in the bags in the produce drawer of the refrigerator.

Room-temperature storage conditions for fruits and vegetables should be dry, cool and dark. Ideally, the temperature should be from 50 to 70 degrees F. Higher temperatures speed up deterioration.

For fresh fruits and vegetables, follow the storage tips on the table below.

Fruit/Vegetable	Storage method/time	Tips
Apples	Room temperature: 1 to 2 days Refrigerator crisper: up to 1 month	Ripen apples at room temperature. Once they are ripe, store them unwashed in plastic bags in the crisper.
Bananas	Room temperature: 2 to 3 days	Ripen bananas at room temperature.
Berries *Blackberries, Raspberries, Strawberries)	Refrigerator crisper: 2 to 3 days	Before storing berries, remove any spoiled or crushed fruits. Store the berries unwashed in plastic bags or plastic containers. Do not remove the green tops from strawberries before storing them.

(Storage tips continued on next page)

Fruit/Vegetable	Storage method/time	Tips
Broccoli	Refrigerator crisper: 3 to 5 days	Store broccoli unwashed in plastic bags.
Beets, Carrots, Parsnips, Radishes, Turnips	Refrigerator crisper: 1 to 2 weeks	Remove green tops and store the vegetables unwashed in plastic bags. Trim the taproots from radishes before storing.
Corn	Refrigerator crisper: 1 to 2 days	For best flavor, use corn immediately. Corn in husks can be stored in plastic bags for 1 to 2 days.
Grapes	Refrigerator crisper: 3 to 5 days	Store grapes unwashed in plastic bags
Herbs	Refrigerator crisper: 2 to 3 days	Herbs may be stored in plastic bags
Lettuce and Greens	Refrigerator crisper: 5 to 7 days for lettuce; 1 to 2 days for greens	Store them unwashed in plastic bags in the refrigerator crisper
Melons (Watermelon, Honeydew, Cantaloupe)	Refrigerator: 3 to 4 days for cut melon	For best flavor, store melons unwashed at room temperature until ripe. Store ripe, cut melon covered in the refrigerator
Nectarines, Peaches, Pears	Refrigerator crisper: 5 days	Ripen the fruit at room temperature, then refrigerate it unwashed in plastic bags.
Onions (Red, White, Yellow, Green)	Room temperature: 2 to 4 weeks for dry onions Refrigerator crisper: 3 to 5 days for green onions	Store dry onions loosely in a mesh bag in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place away from sunlight. Store green onions unwashed.
Oranges	Room temperature: 2 weeks	Best stored at cool room temperature.
Potatoes	Room temperature: 1 to 2 weeks	Store unwashed potatoes in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area away from light, which causes greening.
Tomatoes	Refrigerator crisper: 2 to 3 days for fully ripe tomatoes.	Ripen tomatoes at room temperature away from sunlight. For best flavor, store them unwashed at room temperature and eat them immediately when ripe. Store fully ripened tomatoes unwashed in the refrigerator.

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