

# Fresh Fruits

## Getting the Most Nutrition for Your Money

By Jenna Anding\*

**F**resh fruits are great sources of fiber and vitamins, including vitamin C and folate. According to the U.S.D.A. Food Guide Pyramid, we should eat two to four servings of fruit (fresh, canned or frozen) each day. A serving is equal to a medium piece of fruit (such as an apple, orange or pear),  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dried fruit,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of cooked fruit, or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of 100 percent fruit juice. Whole, fresh fruit provides more fiber than peeled fruits or fruit juices.

### Shop Smart!

**A** market full of a variety of fresh fruits makes it easy to shop and spend more than planned. To help keep your food budget in check when choosing fresh fruits, buy fresh fruits when they are in season. This will help ensure that you and your family get the best tasting and highest quality fresh fruit.

Check out local farmer's markets and roadside stands during peak seasons (often during summer months).

Buy only as much fresh fruit as you need unless you plan to preserve the fruit for later use. Throwing away spoiled fruit is like throwing away money.

Some fruits should be bought when they are ripe. Others can be bought while still immature. To ripen, leave them on the count-

er or place in a paper bag at room temperature. Those fruits will ripen in 2 to 5 days, depending on the variety.

Fruits that will continue to ripen after they are picked include avocados, kiwi, plums, bananas, nectarines, tomatoes, cantaloupe, peaches, honeydew and pears.

Fruits that should be ripe when purchased are apples, grapes, strawberries, berries, lemons, tangerines, cherries, limes, watermelon, grapefruit and pineapple.

### Be Safe!

**M**any fresh fruits have a naturally occurring protective cover. Once washed, the fruit is more likely to decay. Unless dirt is visible, it is best to wash the fruit thoroughly with clean, cool, running water just before it is eaten. If dirt is visible on the fruit, wash the fruit thoroughly to



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avoid introducing dirt and possible bacteria into the refrigerator. Use as soon as possible for best quality. Never use detergents to clean fresh fruit, as the residues from some detergents can be poisonous.

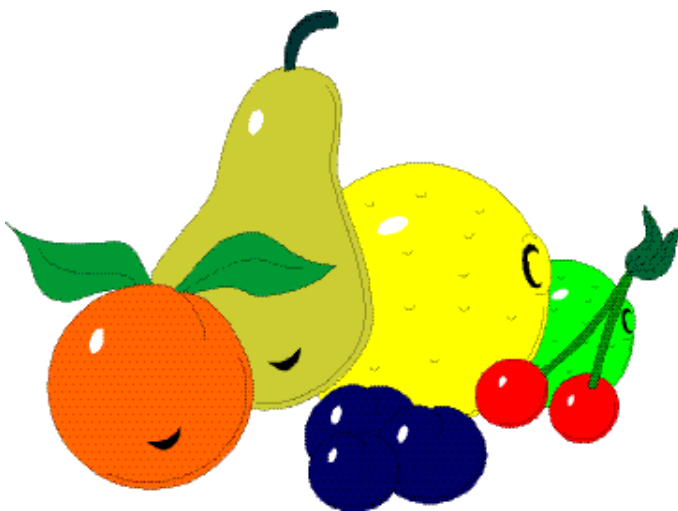
If you are concerned about contaminants on the fresh fruit, simply peel off the skin. This will reduce the amount of fiber and other nutrients, however. If you have a weakened immune system, check with your health care provider about the safety of eating raw fresh fruits.

Store fresh fruits in the refrigerator and away from raw meat, fish or poultry. Do not refrigerate bananas and fruits that need to ripen.

Always wash your hands before handling fresh fruit and make sure that utensils and countertops are clean.

### Eat More!

If you are not in the habit of eating fresh fruit, now is the time to start! To increase your intake of fresh fruit, try the following.



### Instead of:

### Try:

Your morning cup of coffee or favorite carbonated beverage

a glass ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) of orange juice. Canned and frozen juice is okay if the label says 100 percent fruit juice.

Sugar in your cold breakfast cereal

adding ripe fruit such as strawberries peaches or bananas.

Cookies, chips and candy as a snack








snacking on fruit. Make sure the fruit is kept in sight and within reach. The more often you see the fruit, the more likely it is that you may eat it.

### Check the Chart!










The following chart identifies the best times of the year to purchase fresh fruits. It also lists the key nutrients provided by the fruit. Key nutrients are listed if a serving provides at least 10 percent of the recommended daily value, based on a 2000-calorie diet. In addition to the nutrients listed, fruits have disease-fighting compounds called phytochemicals (fight-o-chemicals).

If your favorite fresh fruit is not listed, keep eating it anyway. All fresh fruits are nutritious!





## Selecting Fruits for Availability, Nutritional Value and Quality

Fruit	Availability	Key Nutrients	Buy	Avoid
<b>Apples</b> 	Varies;Red Delicious, Golden Delicious and Granny Smith are available all year.	Fiber and Vitamin C	Apples should be firm and crisp.	Apples with a wrinkled look may be older and will have a poor flavor. Apples that give to slight pressure on the skin are overripe and should not be purchased.
<b>Avocados</b> 	Available all year.	Fiber, Vitamins A, C, Thiamin, Niacin, B <sub>6</sub> , Folate and Riboflavin. More than 70 percent of the calories come from fat, most of which is monounsaturated fat.	Skin may be rough or smooth, green, brown or purplish-black, based on the variety. If it is to be used that day, pick those that are a little soft.	Dark, sunken spots, or cracked surfaces are signs of decay. Note: The "meat" of the avocado will turn brown when exposed to air. To avoid this, peel just before using. The addition of lemon juice also will reduce browning.
<b>Bananas</b> 	Available all year.	Fiber, Vitamin C, Vitamin B <sub>6</sub> and Potassium	Select those that have a firm, bright color and no bruises on the skin. Peak ripeness is when the bananas are solid yellow with brown specks.	Do not buy those with bruised or decaying skin. Note: Very ripe bananas often will be cheaper. They may be peeled and frozen for later use.
<b>Blueberries</b> 	May to September; Blueberries grown in Texas are available May through July.	Fiber and Vitamin C	Select berries that are plump and dark blue in color. Berries should be similar in size, dry, and free from stems or leaves.	Do not buy berries that are soft, mushy or are leaking. Note: Berries have a natural protective coating, so it is best not to wash them until they are ready to be eaten.
<b>Cantaloupes</b> 	May to December	Vitamins C and A	The mature fruit will not have a stem, will have thick veins across the surface, have a good cantaloupe smell, and will be yellowish in color.	Avoid cantaloupes that are very soft, have mold where the stem had been, and/or large bruises.
<b>Grapes</b> 	Thompson seedless (green), June to December; other varieties differ.	Vitamin C	Grapes should be plump, well colored and firmly attached to the stem.	Avoid soft or wrinkled grapes, grapes with stems that are brown and brittle. Avoid grapes that are leaking, which is a sign of decay.
<b>Grapefruits</b> 	October to April	Vitamin C	Firm, heavy fruits are best for eating. Those with thin skins often have more juice than thick-skinned fruits	Grapefruits that lack a bright color or have a soft tender peel that breaks when pressure is applied are old. Note: Skin defects such as scars or scratches do not affect fruit taste.

## Selecting Fruits for Availability, Nutritional Value and Quality (continued)

Fruit	Availability	Key Nutrients	Buy	Avoid
<b>Honeydew Melons</b> 	May to December for Texas-grown honeydew	Vitamin C	Mature fruit is soft, has a velvet-like texture, nice fruit aroma, and yellowish-white to creamy white color rind.	Fruits that are hard, and pure white or greenish in color are too young. Avoid fruits with large bruises and cuts.
<b>Kiwifruit (Kiwi)</b> 	October to June	Fiber and Vitamin C	Unwrinkled fruit that is firm or slightly gives in to pressure is ready to eat	Those that are very soft, wrinkled or that have mold are over ripe. Note: Kiwi has a compound (enzyme) that acts on protein. If kiwi is used in a gelatin dish (which has protein), cook the kiwi for a few minutes before adding it to the gelatin.
<b>Lemons</b> 	Available all year.	Vitamin C	Select those with firm, smooth skin and rich yellow color.	Don't buy lemons that are dull or dark yellow. If the skin is wrinkled, it is not fresh. Soft spots and mold are often signs of decay.
<b>Limes</b> 	August to February	Vitamin C	Shiny skin and heavy weight indicate ripeness.	Limes with dull, dry skin are older. Avoid those with soft spots or mold.
<b>Nectarines</b> 	June to September; peak season is July to August.	Vitamins A and C	The fruit should be plump, but slightly soft along the "seam." Color should be a rich orange-yellow with red.	Hard fruits that were picked too early will be dull in color.
<b>Oranges</b> 	Texas-grown oranges are available October to April. Those grown out of state are available April to November.	Fiber, Vitamins C and Folate	Select firm and heavy oranges with fresh, bright-looking and smooth skin.	Avoid lightweight oranges that have a rough, dull, dry or spongy skin. Note: Texas oranges may have tan, brown or black-colored specks on the skin. This has no effect on quality. Also, surface scarring has no effect on internal quality.
<b>Peaches</b> 	April to August for those grown in Texas; May to November for those grown out of state.	Fiber and Vitamin C	A good peach should give to slight pressure. Look for a golden or creamy yellow background color. A red color does not mean the fruit is ripe.	Peaches that are very hard and green were picked too soon and probably won't ripen. Do not buy peaches that have large, flat bruises.
<b>Pears</b> 	August to May, depending on the variety	Fiber and Vitamin C	Pears should be firm. Desired color will depend on the variety of pear.	Do not buy pears that are wilted, wrinkled or have a dull color.
<b>Pineapples</b> 	Peak season is March to June.	Vitamin C	Ripe pineapples have a yellow color with a good aroma. They are firm and heavy for their size.	Avoid pineapples with a sunken peel, dull yellow color or dried look. Avoid those with bruises, soft spots and mold.

## Selecting Fruits for Availability, Nutritional Value and Quality (continued)

Fruit	Availability	Key Nutrients	Buy	Avoid
<b>Plum</b> 	Peak season is June to August.	Vitamin C	Ripe plums are a little soft. Color depends on the variety.	Very hard fruits, those that have breaks in the skin or skin that is wrinkled should not be purchased.
<b>Strawberries</b> 	Peak season is May through June.	Fiber and Vitamin C	Pick strawberries that have a full red color. Small and medium-sized berries are often better for eating than larger ones.	Berries that are soft, have large uncolored areas, a shrunken look or that have mold should not be picked.
<b>Tangerines</b> 	Peak season is December to January but they are available November to May.	Vitamin C	A fresh tangerine will be deep yellow or orange in color.	Avoid those that have a pale yellow or green color, cuts in the skin or very soft spots.
<b>Watermelons</b> 	May to November; peak season is June to August.	Vitamin C	Select melons that are firm. The flesh should be dark red. Other signs of a ripe melon (not always reliable) are a smooth surface, rounded ends, and a cream colored "belly." Thumping is not a reliable method.	Do not buy melons that are lightweight, or have dents or bruises.

## References and Resources

Home and Garden Bulletin Number 260, "How to Buy Fresh Fruits." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service.

Home and Garden Bulletin Number 252, "The Food Guide Pyramid." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service.

Washington State Apple Commission. P.O. Box 18, Wenatchee, WA 98807.

California Kiwifruit Commission, 1540 River Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95815.

California Tree Fruit Agreement, P.O. Box 255383, Sacramento, CA 95865.

Texas Fresh Produce Guide, Texas Department of Agriculture.  
<http://www.agr.state.tx.us/pyo/default.htm>

Texas Certified Farmers Markets, Texas Department of Agriculture,  
<http://www.agr.state.tx.us/pyo/farmkt.htm>

L-1845, "Nutrient Needs at a Glance." Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

B-5031, "Safe Home Food Storage." Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

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