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Which Produce Should You Refrigerate?

by: Heidi Hackler

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Has this ever happened to you? You anticipate eating that juicy piece of fruit just as soon as you get home from work, only to discover it's spoiled. Or you wait for days for that avocado to ripen, and then next time you check it's past its prime, turning brown, and full of strings.

It can be frustrating to spend your hard earned money on quality produce, only to have it spoil. And Americans throw out a lot of spoiled food. In fact, research done by the University of Arizona in conjunction with the USDA indicates that the average American household throws away **14 percent of their food**—in the form of produce, meat, and grains—to the tune of \$589.76 annually for a family of four. And "this does not include food loss that goes down the garbage disposal, into compost piles, as food to family pets etc."

One way to reduce this waste is to know how to properly store produce so that your fruits and vegetables last longer without spoiling, and you get the full nutritional benefit from eating them.

Some produce is best left out at room temperature, while some does better in the fridge. Other items can be left out to ripen, then put in the fridge to keep from over ripening. The optimal temperature to keep your refrigerator is 37 degrees F. At that temperature, the cool air slows the ripening process and allows food to last longer.

Fruits and vegetables both release ethylene gas, a type of plant hormone, which helps them to ripen. However, fruits release more ethylene gas than veggies, which can lead to the premature spoiling of vegetables that are kept with fruit. So a general rule of thumb is don't store fruits and vegetables together. Most refrigerators have two produce bins; keep your fruits in one and your veggies in the other.

But not all produce should be kept in the fridge. So how do you know how each type of produce should be stored? This handy guide can help.

The A to Z's of Storing Produce for Longest Shelf Life

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Apples – Store apples at room temperature for up to seven days, then in the refrigerator for another week. You can also store them in a cool, dark location for up to four months. Apples are a high ethylene-producing fruit and should be kept away from other fruits and veggies.

Asparagus – Wash and store in the refrigerator, standing upright in a glass of water with a damp paper towel draped over the tops.

Avocados – Store at room temperature until just ripe, then move to the refrigerator to stop the ripening process, store for up to 3 to 4 days. To quickly ripen avocados, place in brown paper bag with a banana.

Bananas – Store at room temperature; bananas give off a lot of ethylene gas and can make all other produce around them ripen quickly. Though brown bananas don't look very appetizing, they actually contain more antioxidants the riper they get.

Berries – Store at room temperature for 2 to 3 days; refrigeration will make them spoil faster. Wash berries just before eating.

Carrots – Store carrots in the refrigerator for up to three months; wash just prior to eating.

Celery – Store in refrigerator wrapped in foil to prolong shelf life.

Citrus Fruit (Grapefruit, Lemons, Limes, Oranges, Tangerines) – citrus fruits last a long time at room temperature and will tend to take on odors if stored in the fridge. Ensure plenty of ventilation around your citrus fruit as they can mold easily in close contact.

Cruciferous Vegetables (Bok Choy, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower) – store in the refrigerator. They are sensitive to ethylene, so store away from high ethylene-releasing produce for longest shelf life.

Corn – leave husks on and refrigerate for up to two days before eating

Cucumbers – Cucumbers do best stored at room temperature rather than in the refrigerator. They are also highly sensitive to ethylene and should be kept away from bananas, melons, and tomatoes.

Eggplant – Best stored at room temperature; refrigerating eggplant can make it spoil quickly. It is also easily susceptible to ethylene gas and should be kept away from high ethylene producers.

Figs – Store your figs in the refrigerator and eat them within 1 or 2 days as they are very perishable. Figs are a high ethylene-producing fruit and should be kept away from other fruits and veggies.

Garlic – Store garlic in a cool, dry location. Use cloves within 10 days after the head has been broken open.

Ginger – To prolong shelf life, store ginger in the refrigerator, wrapped in a paper towel, and in a zippered bag with the air squeezed out.

Grapes – Refrigerate grapes; wash just prior to eating.

Greens (Arugula, Chard, Collard, Lettuce, Kale, Spinach) – keep greens in refrigerator and wash just prior to using. Alternatively, wash, spin-dry, and wrap in paper towels, then store inside an open zippered bag to let them breathe.

Herbs (Basil, Cilantro, Mint, Parsley) – Trim the ends and place like a bouquet in a jar of water on the counter. Storing them at room temperature will ensure they last a week or longer.

Kiwis – Ripen kiwis at room temperature then store in fridge to stop ripening.

Mangos – Ripen mangos at room temperature and eat once ripe. Move to the refrigerator to stop the ripening process, store for up to 3 to 4 days.

Melons (Cantaloupe, Crenshaw, Honeydew, Watermelon) – Store at room temperature until ripe.

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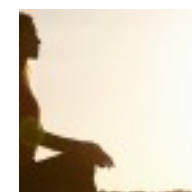
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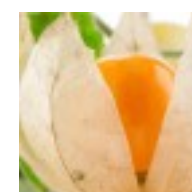


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If you prefer your melon chilled, refrigerate no longer than one day to prevent pitting. Refrigerating melons can also cause their antioxidants to break down. Melons are a high ethylene-producing fruit and should be kept away from other fruits and veggies.

Mushrooms – Refrigerate store-bought mushrooms in their original box. Store wild mushrooms in a paper bag in the refrigerator for a week or two.

Onions – Keep onions in a cool, dry location. Once cut, onions can be stored in a lidded container in the refrigerator for a few days.

Pears – Store at room temperature until just ripe, then move to the refrigerator to stop the ripening process. Store for up to five days.

Peas – Refrigerate in plastic bag and wash or shell just before eating. Peas have a short shelf life so eat soon after purchasing or picking.

Peppers – Refrigerate for 1 to 2 weeks. Keep them dry of moisture, which can cause them to deteriorate quickly. Alternatively, store in a paper bag in a cool, dry location.

Pineapple – Can be stored in the refrigerator or at room temperature. Store upside down for a day or two to allow the sugar stored in the base of the pineapple to spread through the whole fruit before cutting.

Potatoes – Store potatoes in a cool dry place. Refrigeration will break down the starch into sugar and make them spoil quickly.

Stone Fruits (Apricots, Cherries, Nectarines, Peaches, Plums, Pluots) – All stone fruits do best stored at room temperature, then eaten as soon as they are ripe. Apricots are a high ethylene-producing fruit and should be kept away from other fruits and veggies.

Squash – Store winter squash in a cool, dry location for a month or more.

Sweet Potatoes – Store in a cool, dark location for up to one month.

Tomatoes – Store unwashed at room temperature and eat when ripe. Storing tomatoes in the refrigerator will make them mealy and spoil quickly. Tomatoes are a high ethylene-producing fruit and should be kept away from other fruits and veggies.

Zucchini – Store zucchini and other summer squash in a tightly wrapped plastic bag in the fridge for up to five days.

May these produce storage tips help to save the 14 percent of produce that gets tossed each year.

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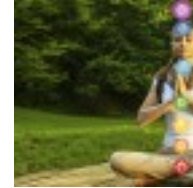
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About the Author

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Heidi Hackler is a Certified Holistic Health Coach (CHHC) and blogger, who received her training from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition (IIN). She inspires healthy habits on her [happiness and wellness blog](#), and through her holistic health coaching programs.



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