

## **Keeping those farm fresh veggies and fruits fresh**

By

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Recently I had a call from a mom asking if she should wash her berries before storing in the fridge. Her 30 something daughter, who, of course, knows everything, insisted that she should wash first. The mom wasn't so sure. In this case, mom knew best.

I too, after a weekend visit to the farm market, am faced with the task of preparing the produce for storage, some of which carry vestiges of field dirt, or may be wet from a recent wash in the packing house. I don't want them to spoil before I can eat them all. And, most of all, I do not want to waste what is edible.

So what is the best way to treat your veggies and fruits and ensure that they will be in the best condition when you go to use them? Well, it depends. Fresh fruits and vegetables require different storage methods and can be stored for various lengths of time.

Best at room temperature—until cut

First, know that some fruits and vegetables keep their quality better if NOT stored in the refrigerator. These include fresh tomatoes, potatoes, onions (except for spring onions and scallions, which must be refrigerated), winter squash, pumpkin and melons, until ripe, then refrigerate. However, once any of these are cut open, they should be refrigerated. Fruits and vegetables stored at room temperature should be in a cool, dry, pest-free, well-ventilated area separate from household chemicals.

Best in the refrigerator

To wash or not to wash? Even the experts disagree when giving advice on washing garden produce. Some tell you not to wash before storage and some will tell you to wash off any garden dirt before even bringing produce into the home. At issue is this: if you bring in garden dirt on your fresh produce, you may be introducing pathogenic microorganisms into your kitchen—while, if you wash your produce before storage, you run the risk of increasing the likelihood that your fresh produce will mold and rot more quickly.

If you choose to wash produce before storage, be sure to thoroughly dry fruits and vegetables with a clean paper towel. If you choose to store without washing, take care to shake, rub or brush off any garden dirt with a paper towel or soft brush while still outside. Never wash berries until you are ready to eat them (Mom was right). Storing fresh produce in plastic bags or containers will minimize the chance that you might contaminate other foods in the refrigerator. Keep your refrigerator fruit and vegetable bin clean. Keep your refrigerator at 40° F or less. If your refrigerator has a fruit and vegetable bin, use that, but be sure to store fresh produce away from (above) raw meats, poultry or fish.

All stored produce should be checked regularly for signs of spoilage such as mold and slime. If spoiled, toss it out. All cut, peeled or cooked vegetables or fruits should be stored in clean, covered containers in the refrigerator at 40° F or less.

### Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Storage Chart

<b>Fruit/Vegetable</b>	<b>Storage method/time</b>	<b>Tips</b>
Beans, green or yellow	Refrigerator crisper: up to 3 days	Store in plastic bags. Do not wash before storing. Wet beans will develop black spots and decay quickly. Wash before preparation.
Broccoli	Refrigerator crisper: 3 to 5 days	Store in loose, perforated plastic bags. Wash before using.
Beets, Carrots, Parsnips, Radish, Turnips	Refrigerator crisper: 1 to 2 weeks	Remove green tops and store vegetables in plastic bags. Trim the taproots from radishes before storing. Wash before using.
Berries	Refrigerator crisper: 2-3 days	Before storing berries, remove any spoiled or crushed fruits. Store unwashed in plastic bags or containers. Do not remove green tops from strawberries before storing. Wash gently under cool running water before using.
Chard	Refrigerator crisper: 2-3 days.	Store leaves in plastic bags. The stalks can be stored longer if separated from the leaves. Wash before using.
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.
Cucumbers	Refrigerator crisper: up to 1 week	Wipe clean and store in plastic bags. Do not store with apples or tomatoes. Wash before using.
Herbs	Refrigerator crisper: 2 to 3 days	Herbs may be stored in plastic bags or place upright in a glass of water (stems down). Cover loosely with plastic bag.
Lettuce, spinach and other greens	Refrigerator crisper: 5 to 7 days for lettuce; 1 to 2 days for greens	Discard outer or wilted leaves. Store in plastic bags in the refrigerator crisper. Wash before using.
Melons	At room temperature until ripe  Refrigerator: 3 to 4 days for cut melon	For best flavor, store melons at room temperature until ripe. Store ripe, cut melon covered in the refrigerator. Wash rind before cutting.
Nectarines, Peaches, Pears	Refrigerator crisper: 5 days	Ripen the fruit at room temperature, and then refrigerate it in plastic bags. Wash before eating.
Peppers	Refrigerator crisper: up to 2 weeks	Wipe clean and store in plastic bags. Wash before using.
Summer squash, patty pan	Refrigerator: 2-3 days	Wipe clean and store in plastic bags. Wash before eating.

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Tomatoes	Room temperature; once cut, refrigerator crisper: 2 to 3 days	Fresh ripe tomatoes should not be stored in the refrigerator. Refrigeration makes them tasteless and mealy. Wipe clean and store tomatoes at room temperature away from sunlight. Wash before eating. (Refrigerate only extra-ripe tomatoes you want to keep from ripening any further.) Store cut tomatoes in the refrigerator.
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For a more inclusive list of produce likely to be purchased from your local farm market, go to [www.foodsafety.uconn.edu](http://www.foodsafety.uconn.edu) and go to Storing Fresh Garden Produce.

Fresh produce can be a source of the microorganisms that cause foodborne illness. The consumer shares responsibility for the safety of the produce they eat. Store safely in a clean refrigerator or storage area; when it is time to prepare your fruits and vegetables for eating, be sure to wash well: do not soak produce in water, but rinse well or dunk and swish in water just to cover, using fingers or scrub brush as appropriate. There is no need use special veggie washes or bleach in the wash water.