

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Selection and Storage Guide

Fruit

Apples - Apples should be firm and heavy for their size, with no soft or brown spots or indentations. Wash very well before using. To core an apple, cut it in half, then in quarters, and using a knife make a circular cut around the seeds and seed casings.

Avocado - A ripe avocado will be slightly firm, but give to gentle pressure. To remove the pit, wash the avocado, and then cut it in half lengthwise, going around the pit. Twist the two halves to separate. Use a spoon to remove the pit and to scoop out the flesh. Throw away the peel. Sprinkle the avocado with lemon juice if you are not using it right away to prevent it from turning brown.

Blueberries - Blueberries are not as perishable as other berries. Discard overly soft berries. Carefully pull off any attached stems. Wash well and then dry on paper towels before eating or using in recipes.

Watermelon - A ripe watermelon will smell sweet and give a hollow thud when thumped. Seedless varieties of watermelon aren't really seedless, but have very small, tender, edible seeds.

Grapes - Look for bunches with the grapes held tightly to the stems. Wash grapes very well before using. Store covered in the refrigerator.

Kiwi - A ripe kiwi will give to gentle pressure from your thumb. The skin and black seeds are edible. Wash just before using and peel the skin if you prefer.

Oranges - A fresh orange feels heavy for its size. Ripe oranges may have green streaks and it does not affect taste or quality. Most oranges are dyed orange before reaching grocery store shelves. Oranges keep well in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.



Apricots - Choose plump apricots that are not too soft and do not have cracks in the skin or white spots. Cut the apricot in half and remove the pit. Apricots may be eaten skin and all. To peel, put in boiling water for 10-20 seconds then plunge immediately into cold water. The peel will slip right off.

Mangoes - Mangoes should smell sweet and be soft when pressed with the fingers, but mangoes should not be wrinkled. Color isn't a reliable indicator of ripeness. To prepare a mango, hold it upright and cut down along one of the fat sides, moving your knife to avoid the large oval pit. Repeat on the other side. Cut the flesh away from the peel. Trim the rest of the fruit off the pit.

Cantaloupe - Ripe cantaloupes smell sweet and give slightly when you gently press against the vine end of the melon (larger indentation). Make sure to wash the cantaloupe before you cut it, to prevent food poisoning. Gently scoop out the seeds with a spoon.

Cranberries - Cranberries are in season in October and November. Look for plump cranberries that are not wrinkled. Discard soft or wrinkled cranberries. Wash before using. Cranberries freeze very well.

Honeydew melon - Melons should be heavy for their size and give slightly when pressed with your fingers. They should also smell sweet, like honey. Wash well before slicing and gently scoop out the seeds.

Lemons and limes - Lemons and limes should feel heavy for their size. To get the most juice, gently roll on the countertop to break down the cell structure. Store on the countertop not the refrigerator.

Star fruit - Star fruit are ripe when yellow and give slightly to pressure. The entire lemony fruit is edible. Just wash and slice.

Berries - Strawberries, raspberries, boysenberries, gooseberries, and blackberries are very perishable. Try to use them the day you buy them for best quality. Wash in cool water, sort, and place on paper towels to drain. Wash right before using.

Papaya – A papaya is ripe when it gives slightly with pressure from your palm. Wash the fruit and remove the peel, then scoop out the seeds if you'd like. The black papaya seeds are edible and have a peppery taste.

Pears - Pears are ripe when they feel firm and have a smooth skin. They feel heavy for their size. Ripen pears by letting them stand at room temperature for a few days. Bosc pears (brown-skinned pears) are best for cooking; Anjou and Bartlett are best for eating fresh.



Cherries - Ripe cherries feel heavy and firm and have a tight skin. Wash very well before eating.

Peaches - Ripe peaches are yellow with a reddish or pink blush, give slightly to pressure and smell sweet. Always wash peaches right before using. The skin is edible but to remove the skin, put peaches in boiling water for 30 seconds then plunge into cold water. The skins should slip right off.

Pineapple - Ripe pineapples smell sweet and give very slightly when pressed at the bottom. To prepare, wash, then grasp the leaves and twist off. Cut the pineapple into four sections, and cut the flesh away from the prickly peel. Remove the hard core and slice the fruit.

Vegetables

Artichokes - A ripe artichoke squeaks when you squeeze it. Artichokes should be compact, firm and heavy for their size. A slight brown tint in the artichokes is good because it tastes sweeter. Wash an artichoke well before cooking. Artichokes can be boiled or steamed until the leaves are easily pulled off.



Asparagus - Choose firm spears with tightly closed tips. Asparagus can be peeled if you prefer. Rinse the spears well, since they can be sandy. Then hold the spears in both hands and bend until they snap. The spears will break naturally at the point where they are tender. Steam or roast them until tender.



Beets - Fresh beets should be firm, round and smooth with no soft spots. Cut off the beet stem, leaves and root, and wash and scrub the beet thoroughly before cooking. Beets can be boiled, oven roasted or steamed. After cooking, the skins will slip off easily. The red stain from beets is permanent, so cover your work surface with waxed paper as you work.



Cucumbers - A ripe cucumber feels firm and should not have any soft spots. Most cucumbers in the grocery store have a waxed coating to help them stay fresh longer. Peel cucumbers to remove the skin and waxed coating. Cooked cucumber has a delicate taste and tender texture.

Greens (Collards, Kale, Swiss Chard) - Choose deep green, large leaves that are not wilted. Store unwashed in refrigerator in a plastic bag. When ready to use them, wash greens very, very well as sand and dirt collect in the leaves.

Jicama - A ripe Jicama feels heavy with no soft spots. Wash, peel, and slice to serve. Jicama is a fresh, crisp root or tuber that has a sweet apple-y flavor. Use in salads and salsas.

Tomatoes - Fresh tomatoes should be firm, but give gently when pressed and should smell sweet like a tomato. Unripe tomatoes have no smell. Wash very well before eating. Store at room temperature. To remove the seeds, cut in half and gently squeeze to remove the seeds. To peel tomatoes, dip briefly in boiling water until the skin begins to split. Cool by plunging into ice water, and the skin will slip right off.

Broccoli - Choose firm, plump heads with no yellow florets. Broccoli florets and stalk can be eaten raw or cooked. Wash well before using. The stalks can be peeled and cut into thin pieces.

Broccoli Rabe - Choose firm stalks with crisp leaves. Some yellow flowers are fine. Wash well before cooking.

Cabbage - Green or red cabbage should be firm and heavy, with leaves tightly attached. Wash the cabbage and remove the outer tough leaves.

Carrots - Small carrots tend to taste sweeter! If you are buying carrots with green tops, remove the tops before refrigerating. Wash carrots right before you use them.

Cauliflower - Ripe cauliflower feels firm, heavy with white florets and no brown spots. Wash well before and cut the stem (if there is one) before using. Cauliflower can go bad quickly. Buy no more than 3 days before using.

Corn - Fresh corn on the cob feels firm and heavy and has bright green, tightly attached husk and light, dry silk. Remove the husk from the cobs right before cooking and pull off the 'silk'.

Winter Squash - Winter squashes have a hard skin that should be firm, and a dry, attached stem. Store in a cool dark place. Winter squash is often baked. Pumpkins, butternut squash, delicata, hubbard, acorn and spaghetti squash are common varieties.

Summer squash - Choose firm, small summer squashes with no soft or brown spots. Wash very well. The skin can be eaten. Summer squashes can be eaten raw or cooked. Varieties include yellow summer squash, crookneck and scalloppini.

Salad Greens - Salad greens can go bad quickly. If you buy loose bunches, choose crisp, tight heads. Wash the leaves carefully and dry well. Prepackaged salad greens are very convenient but make sure to wash them very well.



Leeks - Fresh leeks should have crisp, dark green leaves, with no yellow spots and should feel heavy for their size. Leeks can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Rinse leeks very well right before using as they are grown in sand and the sand can hide in between the leaves.

Mushrooms - Choose mushrooms that are firm with no brown spots. Store in a paper bag in the refrigerator. Rinse quickly before using. Do not soak the mushrooms in water, or they will absorb lots of liquid and be watery. The thin membrane under the cap that covers the gills is called the veil. Mushrooms are fine if the veil is open and you see the gills. Try the different variety of mushrooms like portobella, crimini, morels, shiitake, and oyster mushrooms.

Onions - Buy firm, solid onions with no wet spots. Do not store onions in the refrigerator, or they will soften. Store in a cool dark place separate from potatoes as it shortens the potatoes' shelf life.

Peppers – Sweet peppers can be red, yellow, orange or green. Hot varieties include jalapenos and habaneros. Choose firm, brightly colored peppers and store covered in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days. Wash, cut and remove seeds before slicing or chopping. Be very careful when preparing hot peppers to not touch your eyes, nose or mouth because you may feel a burning sensation.

Potatoes and yams - Potatoes should be firm, heavy, and should not have any sprouts, soft spots or bruises. Wash potatoes very well, and remove any sprouts and green areas. Store in a cool dark place separate from onions as it shortens the onion's shelf life.

Spinach - Purchase fresh spinach with crisp, deep green leaves with no bruises or soft spots. Baby spinach leaves are tender and taste sweet. Wash very well to remove sand. .

Zucchini - Choose firm, smaller zucchini with smooth skin and no soft or brown spots. Larger zucchini can be tough and bitter. Zucchini can be eaten raw or cooked. Wash well before using. The skin is edible, so you can peel it or not as you like. Store in the refrigerator for up to four days.