



GARDEN TO TABLE

STORING FRESH GARDEN PRODUCE

Fresh fruits and vegetables require different storage methods and can be stored for various lengths of time. Some fresh produce (onions, potatoes, tomatoes) is of better quality when not refrigerated. All storage areas should be clean and dry. Fruits and vegetables stored at room temperature should be in a cool, dry, pest-free, well-ventilated area separate from household chemicals. 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.

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. 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.

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.

Fruit/Vegetable	Storage method/ time	Tips
Apples	Room temperature: 1-2 days; refrigerator crisper: up to 1 month	Ripen apples at room temperature. Once ripe, store in plastic bags in the crisper. Wash before eating.
Asparagus	Refrigerator crisper: up to 3 days.	Once picked, asparagus loses quality quickly. Wrap the base of a bunch of asparagus with a moist paper towel, place in a plastic bag and store in the refrigerator. Wash before using.
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 (Blackberries, Raspberries, Strawberries, Blueberries)	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.
Brussel sprouts	Refrigerator crisper: 1-2 days	The fresher the sprouts, the better the flavor. Remove outer leaves and store fresh sprouts in plastic bags. Wash before eating.
Cabbage	Refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.	Store, after removing outer leaves, in perforated plastic bags.
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.
Collards	Refrigerator crisper: 4-5 days	Collards store better than most greens. Wrap leaves in moist paper towels and place in sealed plastic bag. When ready to use wash thoroughly. Greens tend to have dirt and grit clinging to the leaves.
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.

Eggplant	Refrigerator: 1-2 days	Eggplants do not like cool temperatures so they do not store well. Harvest and use them immediately for best flavor. If you must store them, store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Be careful as it will soon develop soft brown spots and become bitter. Use while the stem and cap are still greenish and fresh-looking.
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 delicate 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: Watermelon, Honeydew, Cantaloupe	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.
Onions (Red, White, Yellow, Green)	Dry onions: Room temperature 2 to 4 weeks; green onions: Refrigerator crisper: 3 to 5 days	Store dry onions loosely in a mesh bag in a cool, dry well-ventilated place away from sunlight. Wash green onions carefully before eating.
Peas	Refrigerator: 2-3 days	The sugar in peas quickly begins to turn to starch even while under refrigeration, so eat quickly after harvesting. Store peas in perforated plastic bags. Wash before shelling.
Peppers	Refrigerator crisper: up to 2 weeks	Wipe clean and store in plastic bags. Wash before using.
Potatoes	Room temperature: 1 to 2 weeks	Store potatoes in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area away from light, which causes greening. Scrub well before cooking.
Summer squash, zucchini, patty pan	Refrigerator: 2-3 days	Wipe clean and store in plastic bags. Wash before eating.
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.
Winter squashes, pumpkins	Room temperature for curing; then cool, dry storage area for 3 to 6 months.	<p>Most winter squash benefits from a curing stage; the exceptions are acorn, sweet dumpling and delicata. Wipe clean before curing. Curing is simply holding the squash at room temperature (about 70 degrees) for 10 to 20 days.</p> <p>After curing, transfer to a cool (45 to 50°F), dry place such as the basement or garage for long term storage. Do not allow them to freeze. The large hard rind winter squash can be stored up to six months under these conditions. Warmer temperatures result in a shorter storage time. Refrigeration is too humid for whole squash, and they will deteriorate quickly.</p> <p>The smaller acorn and butternut do not store as well, only up to 3 months. Store cut pieces of winter squash in the refrigerator.</p>

References:

- <http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/veggies/index.html> Watch Your Garden Grow: A guide to growing, storing and preparing vegetables, University of Illinois Extension
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