

STORING FRESH PRODUCE



With the temperatures falling into the 80's and the blessed rain, our vegetable gardens are producing nicely. In order to support this achievement I thought I would share how to store the "fruit of your labor" – *and your vegetables too*. Even if you do not garden and you buy at the farmer's market or grocery store, this

will still be beneficial and help keep your produce fresher, longer. A few of my favorite tips:

First, it's important to know that even though a vegetable has been picked, it isn't dead. It still needs oxygen and will decay faster when oxygen is unavailable. Another is that the less you handle vegetables, the longer they will stay fresh. Did you know apples produce a gas called ethylene which is used in agriculture to increase fruit ripening? That's why your grandmother told you to put an unripe avocado or peach in a brown paper bag with an apple. As the Apple gives off ethylene, the avocado or peach ripens at a faster rate. Grandmother always was a smart lady!



Environment is a significant part of produce storage. Vegetables require storage at different temperatures and relative humidity, to prolong freshness. The chart below provides storing conditions for a few common vegetables. Some vegetables require **cool and dry** conditions (50-60°F and 60% relative humidity); often time a cool place in your kitchen or in a ventilated basement will provide these conditions.

Others respond better under **cold and dry** (32-40°F and 65% relative humidity) conditions. Then there are vegetables that like it **cold and moist** (32-40°F with



95% relative humidity). As storage conditions deviate from optimal conditions, expect a shorter shelf life. Refrigerators typically provide a cold and dry environment, so keeping vegetables in a perforated plastic bag will increase the relative humidity. All of this information was taken from a University of Minnesota Extension publication. As always, happy planting!

HORTICULTURE HAPPENINGS

TEXAS AGRILIFE EXTENSION RANDALL COUNTY

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Commonly-Grown Vegetable Information

Specific harvest and storage information for some commonly-grown vegetables.
Expected shelf-life times are only estimates.

Vegetable	When to Harvest	How to Store	Expected Shelf-Life	Comments
Asparagus	Third year after planting when spears are 6-9 inches long	Cold and moist	2 weeks	Keep upright
Basil	When leaves are still tender	At room temperature	5 days	Keep stems in water; will discolor if kept in refrigerator for 10 days
Beets	When 1.25-3 inches in diameter	Cold and moist	5 months	Store without tops
Broccoli	While flower buds still tight and green	Cold and moist	2 weeks	-
Brussels sprouts	When heads 1 inch in diameter	Cold and moist	1 month	-
Cabbage	When heads compact and firm	Cold and moist	5 months	-
Carrots	When tops 1 inch in diameter	Cold and moist	8 months	Store without tops

Vegetable	When to Harvest	How to Store	Expected Shelf-Life	Comments
Cauliflower	While heads still white, before curds "ricey"	Cold and moist	3 weeks	-
Corn, sweet	When silks dry and brown, kernels should be milky when cut with a thumbnail	Cold and moist	5 days	-
Cucumbers	For slicing, when 6 inches long	Cool spot in kitchen 55°F in perforated plastic bags; storage in refrigerator for a few days okay	1 week	Develops pitting and water-soaked areas if chilled below 40°F; do not store with apples or tomatoes
Eggplant	Before color dulls	Like cucumbers	1 week	Develops pitting, bronzing, pulp browning if stored for long period below 50°F
Kohlrabi	When 2-3 inches in diameter	Cold and moist	2 months	Store without tops
Lettuce	While leaves are tender	Cold and moist	1 week	-
Muskmelons (cantaloupe)	When fruits slip off vine easily, while netting even, fruit firm	Cold and moist	1 week	Develops pitting surface decay with slight freezing
Onions	When necks are tight, scales dry	Cold and dry	4 months	Cure at room temperature 2-4 weeks before storage, do not freeze
Parsnips	When roots reach desired size, possibly after light frost	Cold and moist	4 months	Do not wax or allow roots to freeze; sweetens after 2 weeks storage at 32°F

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Vegetable	When to Harvest	How to Store	Expected Shelf-Life	Comments
Peas	When pods still tender	Cold and Moist	1 week	-
Peppers	When fruits reach desired size or color	Like cucumbers	2 weeks	Develops pitting below 45°F
Potatoes	When vine dies back	Cold and moist; keep away from light	6 months	Cure at 50-60°F or 14 days before storage, will sweeten below 38°F
Pumpkins	When shells harden, before frost	Cool and dry	2 months	Very sensitive to temperatures below 45 °f
Radishes	When roots up to 1/25 inches	Cold and moist	1 month	Store without tops
Rutabagas	When roots reach desired size	Cold and moist	4 months	Do not wax
Spinach	While leaves still tender	Cold and moist	10 days	-
Squash, summer	When fruit 4-6 inches long	Like cucumbers	1 week	Do not store in refrigerator for more than 4 days
Tomatoes, red	When color uniformly pink or red	Like cucumbers	5 days	loses color, firmness and flavor if stored below 40°F; do not refrigerate!

Vegetable	When to Harvest	How to Store	Expected Shelf-Life	Comments
Turnips	When roots reach desired size, possibly after light frost	Cold and Moist	4 months	Can be waxed
Watermelons	When underside turns yellow or produces dull sound when slapped	Like cucumbers	2 weeks	Will decay if stored below 50°F for more than a few days

Taken from University of Minnesota Extension publication

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