

VARY YOUR VEGGIES



How to Select and Store Vegetables

Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., R.D., L.R.D.
Food and Nutrition Specialist

What veggies are in your refrigerator, freezer or pantry?

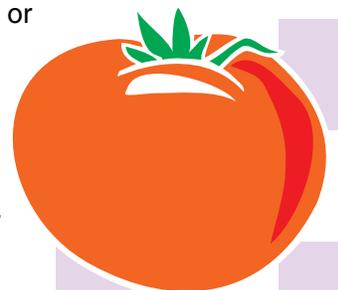
Enjoy veggies at their best with these tips.

How to select vegetables:

- Consider the intended use. For example, canned tomatoes may be less expensive, can be kept on hand and take less time to prepare.
- Buy in season. Vegetables that are purchased in season usually will give you the best quality and best buy.
- Consider the storage available. Buy only what you can store and use within the recommended time.
- Handle produce gently. The bruised parts are most likely to spoil.
- Choose high-quality vegetables. Poor-quality vegetables usually have lower food value, less flavor and more waste.
- Just before going to the grocery store checkout counter, pick up frozen vegetables that are frozen solid and get them to your freezer as quickly as possible.
- Buy canned vegetables in cans without any signs of damage.
- Dried vegetables should be in tightly sealed in undamaged packages.

How to store vegetables:

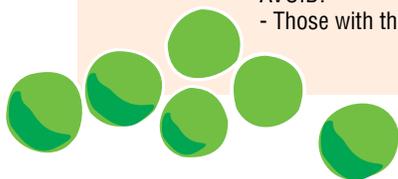
- To maintain food value, flavor, color and texture, store them properly. Most fresh vegetables should be kept cold and humid.
- To increase storage humidity, keep vegetables in a plastic bag or in the hydrator (crisper) compartment of the refrigerator, or both.
- **Do not refrigerate** potatoes, sweet potatoes and hard-shell (winter) squash. Cold temperatures convert the starch into sugar, which affects the flavor. Store them at cool room temperatures; about 50 degrees Fahrenheit is best. Potatoes should be kept in a dark, dry place.
- Sort vegetables before storing and remove any with bruises or soft spots.
- If you wash vegetables before storing them, drain them well.
- Store frozen vegetables at 0 degrees Fahrenheit or lower; they can be stored for eight to 12 months.
- Store canned vegetables in a cool, dry place and use within a year for top quality.
- Store dried vegetables in an airtight container in a cool, dry place. Use them within a few months.



See the following information for storage tips specific to various fresh vegetables.

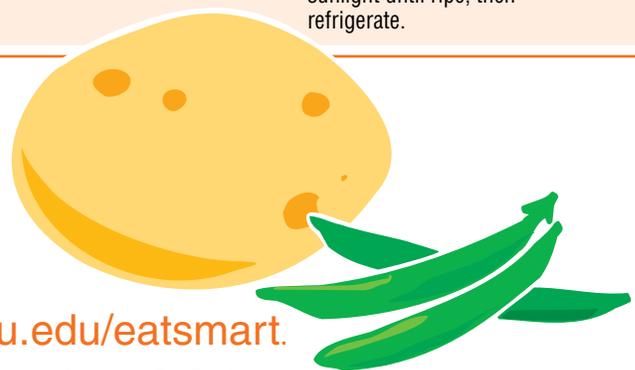
Vegetable	What To Look For	How To Store	How Long
Artichokes	Choose compact, heavy, plump globes w/ large fresh-looking, tightly clinging leaf scales of bright green in spring that may be bronzed in winter. Size does not affect quality.	Keep cold and humid until ready to use.	Few days
Asparagus	Closed, compact tips, smooth, round spears and a fresh appearance. A rich green color should cover most of the spear. Stalks should be tender almost as far down as the green extends. Size of stalk has no relationship to tenderness. AVOID: - Stalks that are soaking in water. - Tips that are open and spread out, moldy or decayed. - Ribbed spears (with up-and-down ridges, or that are not approximately round). All the above are signs of aging, and mean toughness and poor flavor. - Avoid excessively sandy spears because sand grains can lodge beneath the scales or in the tips and are difficult to remove in washing.	Refrigerate	Few days
Green Beans	Green, without scars, discoloration or strings. Pods should be firm, crisp and slender. When broken, they should snap.	Store whole in the refrigerator.	1 week
Beets	Beets should be firm, round, with a slender tap root (the large main root); should be a rich, deep red and smooth over most of the surface. If beets are bunched, you can judge their freshness fairly accurately by the condition of the tops. Badly wilted or decayed tops indicate a lack of freshness, but the roots may be satisfactory if they are firm. AVOID: - Elongated beets with round, scaly areas around the top surface as these will be tough, fibrous and strong-flavored. - Wilted, flabby beets that have been exposed to the air too long.	Refrigerate	Tops, as soon as possible. Roots, 1 week
Broccoli	A firm, compact cluster of small flower buds, with none opened enough to show the bright yellow flower. Bud clusters should be dark green or sage green or even green with a definite purplish cast. Stems should not be too thick or tough. AVOID: - Broccoli with spread bud clusters, enlarged or open buds, yellowish green color or wilted condition, all of which are signs of overmaturity and overlong display.	Refrigerate. Rinse and trim leaves and just stalk ends before using.	3 to 5 days
Brussels Sprouts	Should be firm, compact and have bright leaves. AVOID: - Yellow, soft or loose leaves. - Small holes and ragged edges that may indicate worms.	Refrigerate	3 to 5 days
Cabbage	Heads should be reasonably solid and heavy in relation to size, with a good green or red color. AVOID: - Wilted or decayed outer leaves or those with leaves turning definitely yellow or with worm damage. - Separation of the stems of leaves from the ventral stem at the base of the head because this indicates age.	Refrigerate in plastic bag or film.	1 to 2 weeks
Carrots	Well formed with smooth skins and good orange color. AVOID: - Wilted, flabby, rough or cracked carrots and those with green "sunburned" areas at the top, or spots of soft decay.	Refrigerate, cold and humid	2 to 3 weeks
Cauliflower	White to creamy white, compact, solid and clean curds. A slightly granular or "ricey" texture of the curd will not hurt the eating quality if the surface is compact. Ignore small green leaflets extending through the curd. If jacket leaves are attached, a good green color is a sign of freshness. AVOID: - A spreading of the curd, which is a sign of aging or overmaturity. - Severe wilting or many discolored spots on the curd. - A smudgy or speckled appearance of the curd, which is a sign of insect injury, mold growth or decay.	Refrigerate in crisper	1 week
Celery	Stalks should have a solid feel and fresh-looking leaflets. Soft branches indicate possible pithiness. AVOID: - Wilted stalks. - Brown or black discoloration in central branches. You can freshen celery somewhat by placing the butt end in water, but badly wilted celery never will become really fresh again.	Refrigerate in crisper	1 to 2 weeks

Vegetable	What To Look For	How To Store	How Long
Corn	<p>Fresh, succulent husks with good green color, silk ends that are free from decay or worm injury, and stem ends (opposite from the silk) that are not too discolored or dried. Select ears that are well-covered with plump, not-too-mature kernels.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ears with underdeveloped kernels, which lack yellow color (in yellow varieties). - Old ears with very large kernels and ears with dark yellow kernels with depressed areas on the outer surface. - Ears with yellowed, wilted or dried husks or discolored and dried out stem ends. 	Immediately shuck the corn, wrap in plastic and refrigerate. If corn must be stored a few days, soak the ears in cold water for 30 minutes, drain and refrigerate in plastic.	As soon as possible
Cucumbers	<p>Good green color, firmness over entire length. Well-shaped and well-developed, but not be too large in diameter. Good cucumbers typically have many small lumps on their surfaces. They may have some white or greenish-white color and still be of top quality. The edible wax coating is to prevent moisture loss.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Puffy or overgrown cucumbers that are large in diameter and have a dull color, turning yellowish. - Withered or shriveled ends because these are signs of toughness and bitter flavor. 	Cool and humid	1 week
Eggplant	<p>Firm and heavy with smooth, dark purple or purple-black skin that is free of scars and cuts.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wilted, shriveled or soft eggplants because they are usually bitter. 	Cool and humid: provide enough space to protect delicate skin.	1 week
Endive/ Escarole/ Chicory	<p>Should be fresh, clean, crisp and cold.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dry, yellowing or wilted leaves or those showing reddish discoloration of the hearts. 	Cold and moist	As soon as possible – within 1 week
Leeks	<p>Fresh green tops with necks branched two or three inches from the root. No more than 1½ inches in diameter.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wilted or damaged tops, which are a sign of aging and tough, fibrous roots. 	Refrigerate	1 week
Lettuce	<p>Solid head type, iceberg, should be fairly firm with crisp, medium-green outer leaves. Butterhead, romaine, bibb and leaf should have good color without wilted leaves, insects or dirt.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heads of iceberg type that are very hard and lack green color (signs of overmaturity). Such heads sometimes develop discoloration in the center of the leaves (the midribs) and may have a less attractive flavor. - Irregular shapes and hard bumps on top that may indicate the presence of overgrown central stems. 	Refrigerate in tightly closed plastic bag	1 week
Mushrooms	<p>Young mushrooms that are small to medium in size. Clean caps that either are closed around the stem or moderately open with pink or light tan gills. The surface of the cap should be white, creamy or light brown. Those with open veils, caused by water loss as they mature, are fine for cooking purposes but should be used promptly.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overripe mushrooms (shown by wide-open caps and dark, discolored gills underneath). - Those with pitted or seriously discolored caps. 	Refrigerate in a paper bag or in the cardboard or plastic container in which they were purchased, but only if the overwrap has holes in it for ventilation. Mushrooms stored in plastic bags will become slimy. Or saute lightly in fat and freeze.	As soon as possible, fresh, young up to 1 week
Okra	<p>Pods should be young and tender, preferably 2 to 4 inches long.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dull, dry or shriveled pods. 	Refrigerate	3 to 5 days
Onions, Dry	<p>Hard, firm, dry with papery skin and small necks. Moisture at the neck indicates decay.</p> <p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Those with thick, hollow centers in the neck or with fresh sprouts. 	Keep at room temperature in a well-ventilated area or refrigerate, but always keep them dry.	3 to 4 months



See the following information for storage tips specific to various fresh vegetables.

Vegetable	What To Look For	How To Store	How Long
Onions, Green	Fresh, crisp green tops. AVOID: - Bunches with wilted or discolored leaves.	Refrigerate in plastic.	A few days
Onions, Sweet	Shiny with tissue-thin skin and tight, dry necks. Skin color, although usually yellow, may be red or white as well. Shape varies from flat to round. AVOID: - Spongy onions.	A cool, dry well-ventilated area in a single layer.	1 month
Parsnips	Smooth, firm, well-shaped of small to medium size. Discoloration may be an indication of freezing. AVOID: - Roots that are badly wilted or flabby. They will be tough when cooked.	Refrigerate in a plastic bag. Some recommend time at room temperature for full flavor.	2 to 4 weeks
Peppers, Sweet	Fresh-looking, firm, thick-fleshed and of bright color, depending on stage of maturity. Red sweet peppers are green peppers that have matured and changed color. Golden and purple also available. AVOID: - Peppers that are soft or dull looking or have soft, watery spots.	Cool and humid	A few days to 1 week
Potatoes	Smooth, clean, fairly well shaped, uncut, unbruised and without sprouts. Should not show any green.	Store in cool (45 to 50 degrees), well-ventilated dark area. Do not refrigerate. If stored at too cool a temperature, potatoes may turn dark during cooking.	Several months
Squash, Summer	Small to medium size for the most tender and tasty. Fresh looking, of good shape and color for the variety. Completely edible.	Refrigerate in perforated plastic bag. Wash just before using.	Use as soon as possible (3 to 5 days)
Squash, Winter	Shell should be intact with no soft spots or cracks. Should feel heavy for their size.	A cool, dry, well-ventilated place. Do not refrigerate.	Several months
Sweet Potatoes	Firm, well-shaped with clean, smooth skin. AVOID: - Soft spots or bruises.	Dry, well-ventilated place. Do not refrigerate.	3 to 4 months
Tomatoes	Smooth, firm and plump with good color. Good weight for size. Green tomatoes will ripen but not have the flavor quality of vine-ripened. Do not bruise while handling.	Cool room temperature away from direct sunlight until ripe, then refrigerate.	Few days to 1 week.



Eat Smart. Play Hard. Together.

For more information about nutrition, visit www.ndsu.edu/eatsmart.

Source: Adapted from "Creative Vegetable Cookery," NDSU Extension Service; authored by Pat Beck.

Materials were partially funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

NDSU Extension does not endorse commercial products or companies even though reference may be made to tradenames, trademarks or service names. NDSU encourages you to use and share this content, but please do so under the conditions of our Creative Commons license. You may copy, distribute, transmit and adapt this work as long as you give full attribution, don't use the work for commercial purposes and share your resulting work similarly. For more information, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/agcomm/creative-commons.

County commissions, North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. NDSU does not discriminate in its programs and activities on the basis of age, color, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, participation in lawful off-campus activity, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, spousal relationship to current employee, or veteran status, as applicable. Direct inquiries to Vice Provost for Title IX/ADA Coordinator, Old Main 201, NDSU Main Campus, 701-231-7708, ndsu.eoaa@ndsu.edu. This publication will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities upon request, 701-231-7881.