

Storing Vegetables and fruits

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Q: My garden has really started to produce. I am getting way more tomatoes, beans, eggplant, peaches, melons and figs then I know what to do with. I am storing them in the refrigerator but do not keep very long. Do you have some advice as to how I can keep them longer?

A: So your garden has finally started to produce more vegetable and fruits then you can eat. That is always a wonderful problem to have. You can always give some to a local food bank or your neighbors. You also might want to freeze, “can,” or dry your harvest... but that’s a topic for another day,

Let’s take a look at how to maximize your storing of the harvest in the refrigerator. You should be able to keep things fresh for a couple of weeks or longer with good storage practices. Different vegetable and fruits require different storage temperatures.

First, test your refrigerator with a thermometer at different settings and on various shelves and crispers to determine your current storage temperatures. Most home refrigerators can be maintained at around 45 degrees Fahrenheit (F) or lower. The crisper should be slightly cooler, around 35 degrees F.

Second, harvest early in the morning while temperatures are still cool, this is important to prolonging the shelf life. Veggies should be harvested right when they are ready for eating. Timing of fruit harvest depends on the type of fruit. For more information on when to harvest different fruit, see the home orchard website at [http://homeorchard.ucanr.edu/Fruits & Nuts/](http://homeorchard.ucanr.edu/Fruits_&_Nuts/)

Fruits that have bruises or are very soft should be eaten right away and not stored.

The third step is to prepare the fruit and veggies for storage. For fruit it is important to rinse each piece and dry it. To prevent mold, load the fruit into the fridge in a way that allows good air circulation. Keep the pieces away from the walls and layer them in clean newspaper to reduce fruit-to-fruit infection. For vegetables it is also important to wash the pieces and drain them well. Discard any parts with decay, remove the tops of root crops, and then place them in a crisper. For storage on the refrigerator shelves put them into plastic bags or containers. Finally, store your harvest at the right temperature and humidity for each type of veggie or fruit.

Cold-Cold (32-40 degrees F for veggies, 32-35 degrees F for fruit): Fruits: Deciduous-type fruit (apricot, apple, cherry, fig, nectarine, peach, plum, and pear)

Veggies (with high humidity, 85-95%) such as: Chard, collards, kale, lettuce, spinach, and “bulbs” like green onions, and leeks. Also, in separate plastic bags or containers: Mushrooms, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, carrots, radishes, beets, peas and the following: artichokes, asparagus, celery, rhubarb, and corn unhusked and close to the freezer

Cold (45-55 degrees F, 85-90% humidity) Veggies: Peppers (bell or chili), snap beans, cucumbers, summer squash and ripe melons (these will only keep for four or five days and should be used right after removing them from the fridge).

Cool (like a cellar, 50-60 degrees F) Fruit: For storage of tropical-type fruit, such as olive, citrus, cherimoya, mango, papaya, avocado, feijoa. Veggies: (a) Eggplant, okra, (b) Hard-rind squash, pumpkins, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. Note: If no cellar-like place is available, store (a) type at Cold temperature and (b) type at Room Temperature.

Room Temperature and away from direct light. (Veggies at 65-70° F, fruit at 68-77° F). Fruit: For ripening tropical-type fruit (such as mango or avocado). Veggies: Tomatoes, dry garlic, dry onions, melon (unripe or partly ripe).

Finally, here are some general things to avoid. Don't put ripe fruits and veggies in the same crisper because the fruit will give off ethylene gas. This can damage many veggies, causing yellowing of greens, russet spotting on lettuce, toughening of asparagus, sprouting of potatoes, and bitter taste in carrots. Don't store root crops next to fruits and leafy veggies because they may cause off-flavors (but is OK if they are all in separate bags). And never put wet fruit into the refrigerator as it will mold.