

How to Select the Best PRODUCE



HOW TO SELECT:

- When inspecting fruits and vegetables, use your senses. Ask yourself how the item smells, how it feels, and whether it looks appealing.
- Keep in mind when fruits and vegetables are in season in your area. Produce will be at peak freshness and flavor when in season and may be cheaper than other times of year due to availability.

NUTRITION:

- Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and fats and contain high amounts of antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals.
- ½ cup of fruits and vegetables is the equivalent to one serving. Adults should aim to consume 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

Fruits & Melons:

- Determine if your produce is ripe by picking it up and turning it over in your hands. It should be smooth and even, with a firm-but not rock hard-surface.
- Pay attention to weight – heaviness can indicate how juicy a fruit or melon is, especially with oranges, lemons, watermelon, and cantaloupe.
- Be sure to smell your fruit. A light, sweet smell is a good indicator that your fruit is fresh and ripe.
- Fruit should have even coloration across the surface, and avoid anything with dark marks and spots, or citrus fruits with white streaks or colors on the surface. Also look for the obvious: bruises and dents.

Vegetables & Leafy Greens:

- Pay attention to the surface of the vegetable and make sure it appears consistent, evenly colored, and very firm all the way around.
- With leafy greens like lettuce and kale, look for firm, crisp, and plump leaves that are consistently colored. Expect a little brownness and a few tears in the leaves due to shipping or handling.
- Root vegetables like potatoes, garlic, and onions should be firm and tough, as well. Avoid root vegetables with cracks on the base, this means it is too dry.



STORAGE:

- Generally speaking, if a fruit or vegetable comes from a refrigerated case at the grocery store, it should be stored in the refrigerator. Utilize the crisper drawers in your refrigerator to control humidity.
- Root vegetables, like potatoes and onions, should be stored in a cool, dry, dark place to preserve freshness.
- The length of time you can keep produce without spoilage varies from a few days to several weeks. Depend on your senses to determine whether the produce remains safe to eat: bruises, soft spots, and mold are signs of spoilage.
- Cooked fruits and vegetables can generally be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 3-7 days.¹

LABELS YOU MIGHT NOTICE:

- **PLU Code:** The PLU or Price look-up codes are located on a sticker and it indicates how it was grown. Fruits and vegetables that have a 4-digit code, starting with a 3 or a 4 means it is conventionally grown. If the PLU code is 5 digits and starts with the number 9, it indicates that the produce was grown organically. A five-digit code that starts with an 8 means the item is genetically modified.²
- **Natural:** Generally recognized as a product containing no artificial ingredients, added color, or chemical preservatives, and is only minimally processed (processed so the product is not fundamentally changed).¹
- **Organic:** Identifies practices employed while raising or growing the product. In organic production, crops are raised following USDA organic guidelines which do not allow the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. The organic label does not indicate that the product has safety, quality, or nutritional attributes that are any higher than conventionally raised products.¹
- **Pesticide-free:** These products were grown without the use of pesticides to control damaging weeds, insects, and diseases.



¹ United States Department of Agriculture

² Source: Produce Marketing Association