

The Garden Grocery

Food Safety & Selection at the Farmers' Market

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Farmers' Markets offer a variety of fresh, locally-produced fruits, vegetables, bakery and meat products in a festive atmosphere. Get the most from your local Farmers' Market with the following information.

FYI Facts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates over 1,000,000 people visit a Farmers' Market weekly! More than 20,000 farmers use Farmers' Markets to sell to consumers. The average supermarket produce travels about 2,000 miles to its destination, compared to 50 miles for Farmers' Market produce!

Food & Nutrition

Farmers' Markets offer a colorful variety of fruits and vegetables — which provide vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. Many phytochemicals help the body:

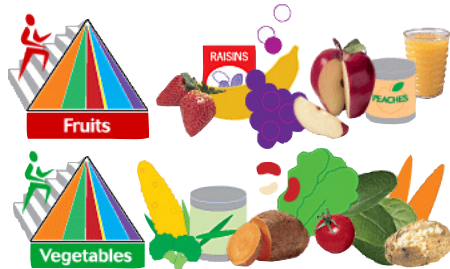
- Stay healthy and energetic
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Protect against the effects of aging
- Reduce the risk of some cancers and heart disease

Use

MyPyramid as your guide: **Eat the equivalent of 2 cups of fruits per day** (for a 2,000 calorie diet). Note this equivalent:

¼ cup dried fruit = ½ cup fruit.

Eat the equivalent of 2½ cups of vegetables per day (for a 2,000 calorie diet). Note this equivalent: 2 cups raw leafy greens = 1 cup of vegetable.



Fruit & vegetable benefits include:

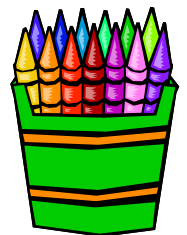
- **Fiber** — Diets rich in dietary fiber have been shown to have a number of beneficial effects including decreased risk of coronary artery disease.
- **Folate** — Healthful diets with adequate folate may reduce a woman's risk of having a child with a brain or spinal cord defect.
- **Potassium** — Diets rich in potassium may help to maintain a healthy blood pressure.
- **Vitamin A** — Vitamin A keeps eyes and skin healthy and helps to protect against infections.
- **Vitamin C** — Vitamin C helps heal cuts and wounds and keep teeth and gums healthy.

Try eating a diet rich in colorful fruits and vegetables: **Blue/Purple, Green, White, Yellow/Orange and Red.**

For optimum health, scientists

say eat a rainbow of colors. Your plate should look like a box of CRAYOLAS.

—Janice M. Horowitz, TIME, January 12, 2002



Food Safety

Go directly home from the market! Avoid side trips. Foods will decline in quality and perishable foods like meats and eggs can pose food safety problems if left sitting in your car. Additional tips for handling food for best safety and quality include:

- **Different fruits and vegetables require different temperature and humidity levels for proper storage.**

Some foods that taste best stored at room temperature include: bananas, melons, onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and winter squashes. Store them in a clean, dry, well-ventilated place, away from direct sunlight and away from areas where meat is prepared.

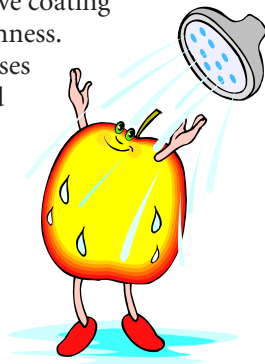
- **Some produce can be ripened on the counter and then stored in the refrigerator.** Examples include: avocados, kiwifruit, nectarines, peaches, pears and plums. Avoid placing produce in a sealed plastic bag on your countertop. This slows ripening and may increase off-odors and decay from the accumulation of carbon dioxide and depletion of oxygen inside the bag.
- **Most other fresh fruits and vegetables keep best stored in a clean refrigerator** at a temperature of 40 degrees F or below. Use your refrigerator crisper drawer for whole produce. Store fruits in a separate refrigerator crisper drawer from vegetables. Fruits give off ethylene gas which can shorten the storage life of vegetables. Some vegetables give off odors that can be absorbed by fruits and affect their quality.
- **Refrigerate fruits and vegetables in perforated plastic bags** to help maintain moisture yet provide air flow. Unperforated plastic bags can lead to the growth of mold or bacteria. If you don't have access to commercial, food-grade, perforated bags, use a sharp object to make several small holes in a food-grade plastic bag (about 20 holes per medium-size bag).



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- **If fruits and vegetables are placed on refrigerator shelves, store meats on pans or plates below the produce** to prevent meat juices—which may contain harmful bacteria—from dripping on them.
- **Wash hands before working with produce.**
- **Wash produce thoroughly. Wash produce before you use it, NOT when you bring it home!**

Fresh produce has a natural protective coating that helps keep in moisture and freshness. Washing produce before storage causes it to spoil faster. Remove and discard outer leaves. Rinse under clean, running water just before preparing or eating. Don't use soap or detergent as it can get into produce and make you sick. Rub briskly—scrubbing with a clean brush or hands—to clean the surface. Dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.



Store fruits in a separate refrigerator crisper drawer from vegetables.

- **Rinse produce even when the peel is removed—such as for melons and citrus fruits!** Bacteria on the outside of produce can be transferred to the inside when produce is cut or peeled. Once you have cut through the protective skin of fruits and vegetables, bacteria can enter. Refrigerate cut or peeled fruits and vegetables within TWO hours!

Friendly Advice

Farmers' Markets are a great place to shop and to get some exercise! Enjoy walking around the market! Have fun looking at all the produce and goodies! Got kids or grandkids? Take them along!

Bring some cash or money saving coupons — vendors may not accept checks or credit cards in some areas. Take your own canvas or net bags or baskets, as Farmers' Markets don't usually have shopping carts.

Dress comfortably! Weather can change fast, so keep a jacket and umbrella in the car in case of wet weather. Wear comfortable shoes if you have to walk a lot.

On warm days, the quality of unrefrigerated fruits and vegetables can decline from morning to afternoon. However, you might get a great deal at the end of the day!

Aim to buy foods you'll eat now when they are fresh. Select an amount you can use within a short time, especially, if you won't need it right away.



For More Information

“Pick” more produce facts at the following Websites:

- <http://lancaster.unl.edu/nep/FruitVeggie.shtml>
- www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov
- www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

For further questions, contact your local extension office.

This is a peer-reviewed publication.

6/07