



By Alice Henneman, MS, RD, UNL Extension Educator

Here's a recipe to enjoy making from fresh summer produce—perhaps some you purchased at the Farmers' Market!

## Tomato, Cucumber and Red Onion Salad with Mint

Preparation Time: 10 minutes • Number of Servings: 6  
Cups of Fruits and Vegetables Per Person: 1

**2 large cucumbers, halved lengthwise, seeded and sliced**

**1/3 cup red wine vinegar**

**1 tablespoon white sugar**

**1 teaspoon salt**

**3 large tomatoes, seeded and coarsely chopped**

**2/3 cup coarsely chopped red onion**

**1/2 cup chopped fresh mint leaves\***

**1 tablespoon olive oil**

In a large bowl, toss together the cucumbers, vinegar, sugar and salt. Let stand at room temperature for an hour, stirring occasionally. Add tomatoes, onion, mint and oil to cucumbers and toss to blend.

*Nutrition Facts: Amount Per Serving: calories 70, saturated fat 0g, cholesterol 0mg, sodium 400mg, total carbohydrate 12g, dietary fiber 2g, sugars 7g, protein 2g.*

\*Cook's note: If you prefer, leave out the mint in this recipe

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov)

## Save Time & Money by Planning Meals



Helping limited-resource families learn to prepare nutritious and safe foods while stretching their food dollars.

**Julie Rasmussen**  
UNL Extension Associate

Are you tired of looking through your cupboards and freezer trying to answer the question, "What's for dinner?"

A simple meal planning system may be the answer. Often people will say they do not have time to plan meals, but in reality, taking a few minutes one day a week to plan meals will save time. A meal planning system will allow you to spend less time and money at the grocery store, make fewer trips to the store and think about meal planning one day a week instead of daily.

You can have a very complex system or a very simple one that allows for more flexibility. A good way to get started is to plan the seven main meals your family usually eats together for a week. Have family members brainstorm and come up with all of their favorite main dishes. Keep the list and refer to it each week as you prepare your weekly menus.

The next step is to check your supplies to see what you

have on-hand and what needs to be used. It is a good idea to look at the grocery ads to see what is on sale. After you have gathered this information, choose the seven main family meals for the week. Check the calendar so the menu fits with the family's schedule. On evenings when the family is eating in shifts, sandwiches or a casserole that can be reheated might be good choices.

Use MyPyramid as a guide so the meal not only tastes good, but meets the nutritional guidelines as well. Offer a variety of fruits and vegetables in your meals, select low-fat meats and dairy products and select whole grain foods for added fiber.

Here are some additional meal planning tips.

- Add texture and color to your meals with fruits and vegetables.
- Be flexible to allow for changes in schedules.
- Have your family help with meal planning and preparation.
- Recycle your meal plans. You might have a different set of menus for each season.
- Keep ingredients on hand for very simple meals for those days when you are especially tired or busy.

You can save time, money and your meals can be more nutritious if you plan your meals. It may surprise you how easy it can be!

**Amy Peterson and Alice Henneman**  
UNL Extension Educators

It's the season for Farmers' Markets! Farmers' Markets offer a variety of fresh, locally-produced fruits, vegetables, bakery and meat products in a festive atmosphere. Enjoy a trip to the Farmers' Market. Take your family with you! Here are some tips to help you enjoy your purchases.

### Go Directly Home

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.

### Proper Storage

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.

Other 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.



**Store fruits in a separate refrigerator crisper drawer from 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).

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

Wash hands before working with produce.

### Wash 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.

Cut away bruised and damaged areas. Bacteria on the outside of produce can be transferred to the inside when they are cut or peeled. Rinse produce even when the peel is removed—such as for melons and citrus fruits! 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!

### Selecting Amounts

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.

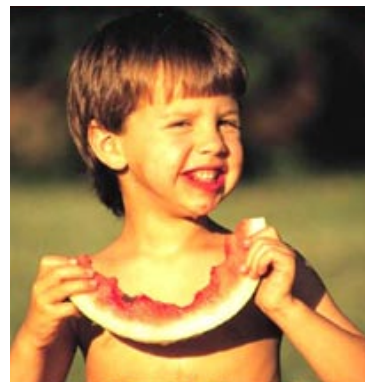
### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To view an online slide show about food safety and selection at Farmers' Markets, go to <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/farmers-market.shtml>

## Focus on Watermelon

**An American favorite for meals and snacks.** People can't seem to get enough of the sweet treat, and nutritionists have long appreciated the health benefits watermelon provides. Recently, research has shed new light on its potential health benefits. Watermelon contains high concentrations of lycopene, an antioxidant that may help reduce the risks of cancer and other diseases.

**Watermelon, the fruit that is really a vegetable.** Watermelon can be traced back to Africa and is part of the cucumber and squash family. It is perhaps the most refreshing, thirst quenching fruit of all. Watermelon consists of 92 percent water and 8 percent sugar, so it is aptly named. Americans eat



over 17 pounds of watermelon each year. The largest one on world record (Guinness Book of World Records) weighed 262 pounds.

**When to look for them in your grocery store.** Watermelons are available all year. The natural sweetness of watermelon makes it a favorite anytime of the year. It is a perfect addition to a salad, salsa or

cool drink. Top chunks of sweet watermelon with fruit flavored sherbets or sorbets.

**Selecting.** Choose firm fruit which is free of cracks, bruises, soft spots or mold. Ripe watermelon will have a healthy sheen, a dull rind, dried stem and a buttery yellow underside where it touched the ground. There should be a melon-like smell or fragrance. If you must thump—sound should be dull and hollow. Lift it—weight should be heavy for the size. Avoid watermelon that are very hard, white or very pale green in color on the underside, indicating immaturity.

Source: Adapted slightly from *Fruit of the Month: Watermelon*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/month/watermelon.html](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/month/watermelon.html)