

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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*“Storing Fruits and Veggies for Maximum Enjoyment”*

Now that summer is here, fresh fruits and vegetables are available everywhere, bringing with them the challenge of proper storage so we can enjoy every bite. The storage method that is utilized depends on the types of produce that you are keeping and where they are kept.

Your summertime favorites like fresh berries, cherries, grapes and stone fruit including apricots are highly perishable and need to be refrigerated. Berries, especially, can become moldy in just a couple of days. Apples, on the other hand, can be kept at room temperature if they’re going to be used within seven days.

Leafy greens, celery, carrots, broccoli, green beans and asparagus all need to be refrigerated as well. With asparagus, particularly, it is a good idea to put the bottom ends in a cup of water and store in the refrigerator. This will help keep asparagus hydrated so they don’t wrinkle up and dry out. Some types of produce need a little more ripening when they’re first brought home. Karen Blakeslee, KSU food safety specialist, recommends leaving nectarines, peaches, pears and plums on the counter so they can ripen and then put them in the refrigerator.

If your peaches are a little hard, put them in a paper bag, fold the top down, and let the natural ethylene gas help the peaches ripen. Another trick you can use is to place an apple in the bag, to speed up the ripening process. The key is to watch those fruits closely because they can ripen quickly. There are plenty of other types of produce that can be left at room temperature, including: bananas, melons, citrus fruits, pineapple, tomatoes, onions, garlic and potatoes.

However, if bananas are starting to show brown spots, they need to be refrigerated, frozen or made into a smoothie or banana bread. Onions and garlic should be stored away from potatoes because they can cause potatoes to sprout faster. With all produce, especially any of these that are at room temperature, once you cut them open, and if you have leftovers, you have to refrigerate them to keep them safe to eat.

Some other helpful tips for selecting and handling your fresh fruits and vegetables include:

When selecting melons at a store or farmers market, it is recommended to look at the bottom of a melon rather than thumping or tapping on it to judge its ripeness. Instead, note the color of the melon, looking for a butter yellow color. Likewise, when the stem area of a cantaloupe is no longer green and you can detect the signature smell of the cantaloupe, it’s ready to be eaten. Rinse the outside of melons with water and scrub with a produce brush before cutting them up.

Take advantage of the plastic bags available at the store. They provide a barrier between fresh produce and fresh meats to prevent potential cross-contamination.

Don't wash leafy greens or berries immediately after bringing them home and before putting them in the refrigerator. That could shorten their shelf life. Generally, it is better to wait to wash produce until you're ready to use them.

Information comes from K-State University food safety specialist and coordinator of the Rapid Response Center, Karen Blakeslee.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at [benjam63@ksu.edu](mailto:benjam63@ksu.edu), or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.