



THE GARDEN GROCERY

Food Safety & Selection at Farmers' Markets

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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! The average supermarket produce travels about 2,000 miles to its destination, compared to 50 miles for farmers' market produce! That's like traveling from Chicago to Los Angeles!

Food & Nutrition

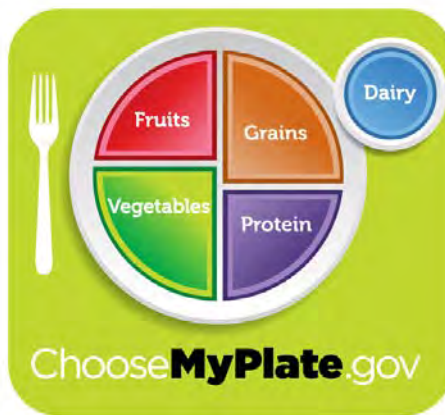
Farmers' markets offer a colorful variety of fruits and vegetables — which provide vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. Many phytochemicals help the body:

- stay healthy and energetic,
- maintain a healthy weight,
- protect against the effects of aging, and
- reduce the risk of some cancers and heart disease.

Use MyPlate as your guide: **Eat the equivalent of 2 cups of fruits per day** (for a 2,000 calorie diet). Note this equivalent: 1/4 cup dried fruit = 1/2 cup fruit. **Eat the equivalent of 2-1/2 cups of vegetables per day** (for a 2,000 calorie diet). Note this



Photos by Alice Henneman



equivalent: 2 cups raw leafy greens = 1 cup of vegetable.

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:

“For optimum health, scientists say eat a rainbow of colors. Your plate should look like a box of crayons.”

—Janice M. Horowitz,
TIME, Jan. 12, 2002)

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.

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Some produce can be ripened on the counter and then stored in the refrigerator.

Examples include: nectarines, peaches, pears and plums. Avoid leaving produce in a sealed plastic bag on your countertop. This slows ripening and may increase odors and decay from the accumulation of carbon dioxide and depletion of oxygen inside the bag.



Avoid leaving produce in a sealed plastic bag on your countertop.



Store fruits in a separate refrigerator crisper drawer from vegetables.

Most other fresh fruits and vegetables keep best stored in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40°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).

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. Cut away bruised and damaged areas.

Rinse fruits and vegetables even if they have a peel which will be removed (such as melons and citrus fruit). Bacteria on the outside of produce can be transferred to the inside when they are cut or peeled.



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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. Try these tips for market bags:

- Wide woven baskets help prevent produce from piling on each other.
- Place heavier items at the bottom of the basket or bag.
- To avoid squishing your produce, consider shopping with several bags or baskets.
- Reusable bags are an eco-friendly alternative to plastic bags for carting your food home from the farmer's market, grocery store or big box store. You can help prevent bacteria, yeasts and mold from growing on your bags and cross-contaminating your food by washing and storing the bags safely between each use.

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.



Shop early — the most popular items go first!

Shop early! The most popular items go first! Enjoy the cooler mornings for your market adventure! Avoid over-buying. Buy only what you'll eat when fresh.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

"Pick" more produce facts at the following websites:

- <http://food.unl.edu/nep-materials>
- www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org
- <http://food.unl.edu/garden-grocery-food-safety-selection-farmers-market>