IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension and Outreach

Fresh Vegetable Guide



Eat your vegetables!

Vegetables are an excellent source of several nutrients our bodies need, such as vitamins A and C, fiber, and potassium.

Both fiber and potassium are considered nutrients of public health concern, because most of the population does not consume enough of these important nutrients. Eating a well-balanced diet with plenty of vegetables can help increase your daily intake.

Research shows many benefits to eating vegetables. Eating vegetables is linked to lower risk of many chronic health conditions including overweight and obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer. A diet filled with vegetables can also improve eye and gut health. The potassium in vegetables helps with blood pressure and fluid regulation, while the fiber promotes regular bowel movements and fullness.

There are many vegetables to choose from stores, farmers markets, and gardens. When eating vegetables, it is important to include different colors of vegetables for health benefits. Examples of vegetables in each color category include:

Red: peppers, radishes, tomatoes

Orange: carrots, pumpkin, squash, sweet potatoes

Yellow: cauliflower, leeks, onions, rutabaga, peppers, potatoes, squash, sweet corn

Green: asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cucumbers, leafy greens, kale, okra, peas, peppers, snap beans, spinach, zucchini

Blue or Purple: beets, eggplants, kale, kohlrabi



Seasonality is Important

For optimal saving and flavors, select fresh vegetables that are in-season. Options for harvest months in Iowa are:

May: asparagus, leaf lettuce, radish, spinach

June: asparagus, beans, beets, bok choy, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, chard, collards, leaf lettuce, leeks, kale, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach

July: asparagus, beans, beets, bok choy, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, chard, collards, cucumber, leaf lettuce, leeks, onions, peppers, potatoes, radishes, spinach, summer squash, sweet corn, tomatoes, zucchini

August: beans, beets, bok choy, cabbage, carrots, chard, collards, cucumber, egaplant. kale, kholarabi, leaf lettuce, leeks, okra, onions, peppers, potatoes, radish, rutabaga, spinach, summer squash, sweet corn, tomatoes, zucchini

September: beans, beets, bok choy, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, chard, eggplant, kohlrabi, leaf lettuce, leeks, okra, onions, peppers, potatoes, pumpkin, radish, rutabaga, spinach, summer squash, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, turnips, winter squash, zucchini

October: beets, bok choy, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, chard, kohlrabi, leaf lettuce, peppers, potatoes, pumpkin, spinach, sweet potatoes, turnips, winter squash

When fresh vegetables are not in season, frozen or canned varieties provide optimal savings and flavors with as much, if not more, nutritional benefits.



Vegetable Prep Tips

Raw produce can carry bacteria or viruses (from soil, people who handle produce, or knives/cutting boards in your kitchen) that can make you sick.

Steps to prepare fresh vegetables:

- 1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water and dry them with a clean cloth or paper towel before starting to prepare any produce.
- 2. Use a clean cutting board, knife, and other kitchen equipment. Try to use different cooking utensils for produce and protein items. If that is not possible, be sure to wash cutting boards, knives, and other kitchen equipment well with hot, soapy water prior to preparing produce. Avoid using steak knives and wood cutting boards.
- 3. It is best to wash most produce immediately prior to preparing them.
- 4. Wash all produce, even if you plan to peel it; bacteria and viruses on the surface can be transferred into the edible portion throughout the preparation process. The exception to this rule is pre-cut, pre-washed leafy greens: washing these items actually increases the risk of foodborne illness.
- 5. Wash produce under cool or warm running water. Neither soap nor produce rinses are necessary. Use a scrub brush on firm vegetables. Various leafy greens may need to be rinsed several times to remove soil or sand.
- 6. Dry produce with a clean cloth or paper towel. Or allow the produce to air dry on a rack set over a pan.
- 7. Try not to wash leafy greens until immediately prior to preparation. If necessary, be sure to blot off any excess water with a clean cloth or paper towel and store in a clean, clear plastic bag or container.

Revised by Ruth Litchfield, state extension specialist. Originally prepared by Barbara Anderson and Catherine Strohbehn, retired extension specialists, and Alyson Miller, former dietetic intern.

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Radishes Firm, crisp roots with fresh and bright green leaf tops; avoid large roots and limp, slimy green leaf tops Rutabaga Smooth and firm roots with a round shape; avoid puncture, deep cuts, cracks, or other signs of decay Snap Beans Tender, crisp, well-shaped, smooth, velvety skin Spinach Deep green-colored, crisp leaves Small to medium size, shiny skin, solid flesh Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in tightly wrapped plastic bag for 1 to 2 days Place stem-side down at room temperature; refrigerating causes flavor loss	Potatoes		
Rutabaga Smooth and firm roots with a round shape; avoid puncture, deep cuts, cracks, or other signs of decay Store in a cool, dry place for up to 3 months Snap Beans Tender, crisp, well-shaped, smooth, velvety skin Store in plastic bag for 4 or 5 days Spinach Deep green-colored, crisp leaves Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Summer squash (patty pan, zucchini) Small to medium size, shiny skin, solid flesh Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Sweet corn Bright green, snug-fitting husk; evenly spaced, plump kernels visible when husk peeled back Place stem-side down at room temperature; refrigerating causes flavor loss	Pumpkin	Rock-solid, firm, full stem, matte skin	
Snap Beans Tender, crisp, well-shaped, smooth, velvety skin Spinach Deep green-colored, crisp leaves Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Small to medium size, shiny skin, solid flesh Sweet corn Bright green, snug-fitting husk; evenly spaced, plump kernels visible when husk peeled back Tomatoes Firm, fully colored, plump, green stems; no brown spots Store in a cooi, dry place for up to 3 months Store in a cooi, dry place for up to 5 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days	Radishes		
SpinachDeep green-colored, crisp leavesRefrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 daysSummer squash (patty pan, zucchini)Small to medium size, shiny skin, solid fleshRefrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 daysSweet cornBright green, snug-fitting husk; evenly spaced, plump kernels visible when husk peeled backRefrigerate in tightly wrapped plastic bag for 1 to 2 daysTomatoesFirm, fully colored, plump, green stems; no brown spotsPlace stem-side down at room temperature; refrigerating causes flavor loss	Rutabaga		Store in a cool, dry place for up to 3 months
Summer squash (patty pan, zucchini)Small to medium size, shiny skin, solid fleshRefrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 daysSweet cornBright green, snug-fitting husk; evenly spaced, plump kernels visible when husk peeled backRefrigerate in tightly wrapped plastic bag for 1 to 2 daysTomatoesFirm, fully colored, plump, green stems; no brown spotsPlace stem-side down at room temperature; refrigerating causes flavor loss	Snap Beans	Tender, crisp, well-shaped, smooth, velvety skin	Store in plastic bag for 4 or 5 days
Sweet corn Bright green, snug-fitting husk; evenly spaced, plump kernels visible when husk peeled back Place stem-side down at room temperature; refrigerating causes flavor loss	Spinach	Deep green-colored, crisp leaves	Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days
Tomatoes Visible when husk peeled back Firm, fully colored, plump, green stems; no brown spots Place stem-side down at room temperature; refrigerating causes flavor loss	•	Small to medium size, shiny skin, solid flesh	Refrigerate in plastic bag for 2 to 3 days
causes flavor loss	Sweet corn		Refrigerate in tightly wrapped plastic bag for 1 to 2 days
Winter squash Rock-solid, firm, full stem, matte skin, heavy for size; no soft spots Store in cool, dry place; thick-skinned will keep longer than	Tomatoes	Firm, fully colored, plump, green stems; no brown spots	
(acorn, butternut) or bruises thin-skinned			