

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, eggplant, kale, kohlrabi, 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.

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VEGETABLE	SELECTION	STORAGE TIPS
Asparagus	Firm, plump, straight spears with compact tips; medium green color with purple tinge; (white stalks are often tough)	Wrap cut ends in damp paper towel; put in plastic bag; store in refrigerator crisper up to 4 days
Beets	Smooth, hard, round, deep color; smaller size usually more tender	Cut off greens before storing in refrigerator up to 2 weeks
Bok choy	Thick, fleshy, firm stalks with bright-colored whole green leaves	Store in plastic bag in refrigerator for 1 to 2 days
Broccoli	Dark green to purple buds, tightly closed, with firm stems; avoid heads with yellowing	Store in plastic bag in crisper drawer for 3 to 5 days
Brussels sprouts	Firm, compact, bright green, heavy for size	Store in refrigerator for 3 to 5 days
Cabbage	Crisp, firm, packed head that is heavy for its size and does not smell too strong	Tightly wrap in plastic and refrigerate; flavor and odor increases with storage
Carrots	Firm, bright orange color, smooth, well-shaped	Keep in plastic bag in refrigerator up to 2 weeks
Cauliflower	Firm, compact, creamy-white heads with florets tightly pressed together; avoid heads with brown spots on florets	Keep in plastic bag in refrigerator about 1 week
Cucumber	Firm, deep green color, well-shaped, small to medium in size; no soft or yellow spots	Refrigerate up to 1 week
Eggplant	Firm, shiny skin, heavy for size, green stems; no soft spots or wrinkled skin	Keeps in refrigerator up to 4 days
Kohlrabi	Small, smooth bulb-stems, firm green leaves	Remove leaves; store in refrigerator for several weeks
Leafy Greens <i>(chard, collards, kale)</i>	Deep green color; fresh, plump, crisp leaves; no thick stems or strong odor	Refrigerate in plastic bag for 3 to 5 days
Leaf lettuce <i>(romaine, butterhead)</i>	Bright color, crisp leaves; avoid decaying or browning leaves	Store whole heads in plastic bag for 3 to 5 days
Leeks	Fresh, green tops with a branched neck and no more than an inch or two in diameter; avoid wilted or damaged tips.	Store in the refrigerator and use within 1 week
Okra	Young and tender pods; avoid dull or shredded pods	Refrigerate in plastic bag for 3 to 5 days
Onions <i>(red, white, yellow)</i>	Blemish-free, dry, shiny, firm, tightly closed neck	Store in loosely woven bag, in a cool, dark, dry area
Peas	Bright green pods filled with pearl-shaped peas	Store in plastic bag in refrigerator for 3 to 4 days
Peppers	Firm, bright color, heavy for their size; no brown or soft spots	Store 3 to 4 days in refrigerator
Potatoes	Firm and smooth, few eyes, blemish-free; no sprouts, soft spots, or green coloring	Store in cool, dry place for 2 weeks; cut out any green areas and trim any sprouts before using
Pumpkin	Rock-solid, firm, full stem, matte skin	Store in cool, dry place; thick-skinned keeps longer than thin-skinned
Radishes	Firm, crisp roots with fresh and bright green leaf tops; avoid large roots and limp, slimy green leaf tops	Refrigerate in plastic bag for up to 2 weeks with tops cut off; green leaf tops can be added into salads
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 <i>(patty pan, zucchini)</i>	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	Refrigerate in tightly wrapped plastic bag for 1 to 2 days
Tomatoes	Firm, fully colored, plump, green stems; no brown spots	Place stem-side down at room temperature; refrigerating causes flavor loss
Winter squash <i>(acorn, butternut)</i>	Rock-solid, firm, full stem, matte skin, heavy for size; no soft spots or bruises	Store in cool, dry place; thick-skinned will keep longer than thin-skinned