

**Purchasing and Consuming Local Produce**  
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Consumption of fruits and vegetables provide us with numerous valuable dietary nutrients. Next time you purchase produce consider buying locally grown. Summer time is the perfect time of year to purchase locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farm stands and farmer's markets. Local growers do a good job of providing safe, quality products for consumers.

Buying locally grown fruits and vegetables has many benefits. There is nothing better than eating a tomato or ear of corn fresh from the garden. Besides having wonderful taste, locally grown produce is packed with nutrition. Consider that most fruits and vegetables in the grocery store are shipped to our area from across the country. Although these items provide plenty of nutrition they do lose nutrient value during transportation and storage. Locally grown produce on the other hand is usually sold within hours or a few days of harvest and does not suffer the same nutrient loss that can occur during transportation. In addition to the nutritional benefits of local produce, buying locally supports the local economy and preserves open space.

To make the most of your purchase, look for fruits and vegetables that are free from unusual odors or colors and obvious signs of spoilage such as mold. Remember to handle gently so as to reduce bruising which can quicken spoilage. Avoid side trips on your way home that would allow your fresh fruits and vegetables to sit in a hot car on a sunny day. The heat in the car can decrease the quality and shelf life of food.

For optimal quality, it is important to properly store fruits and vegetables once you arrive at your home or vacation destination. Do not wash fruits and vegetables prior to storage. Most

produce has a natural protective coating that keeps in moisture and freshness. Washing prior to storage can cause it to spoil faster.

Local produce such as melons, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and winter squashes can be stored at room temperatures. Peaches are one type of fruit that can be ripened at room temperature then in the refrigerator to extend its shelf life. Most other fruits and vegetables that you can buy locally keep best in a clean refrigerator set at 40° F or lower. Fruits and vegetables should be stored separately in the refrigerator. Fruit gives off an ethylene gas that can shorten the shelf life of vegetables. On the other hand, vegetables give off odors that can be absorbed by fruits and can affect its' quality. If produce has to be stored on open refrigerator shelves, store it above meat, fish or poultry. This will prevent the fruits and vegetables from becoming contaminated with juices from raw meat and poultry.

Follow these simple guidelines once you are ready to consume fruits and vegetables: Wash them right before eating or preparing, even if they will be peeled or sliced. For example, scrub the outside rind of cantaloupe prior to slicing. Slicing a dirty melon can cause dirt and bacteria to be transferred to the flesh of the fruit from the knife. Also, it is unnecessary and potentially hazardous to wash with detergent or bleach. Use your hands or a scrub brush to rub dirt and other potential pathogens from the surface of the fruit or vegetable. Remove the outer leaves of heads of lettuce and discard. Refrigerate or eat peeled fruits and vegetables within 2 hours. Finally, enjoy your food.

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