

Take care to keep fruits, vegetables fresh

A headache is spending a \$100 on food, then finding fruits and vegetables rotting in the refrigerator or on the kitchen counter. Even under ideal storage conditions, the right temperature and humidity, some fresh vegetables retain top quality only a few days.

Some fruits last longer, but special care needs to be taken to ensure all the nutrients and good flavor are retained. Following are some storage tips for fruits and vegetables.

Green leafy vegetables quickly wilt and change flavor as water evaporates from tissues. Most fresh green vegetables keep well and stay crisp if put in covered containers or plastic bags, then refrigerated. If you wash lettuce, celery and other leafy vegetables before storing, drain thoroughly because too much moisture can hasten decay.

Store these vegetables away from the fruits in the refrigerator. As some fruits ripen, they produce a gas that will make lettuce, spinach and other leafy greens turn brown. When this happens we generally throw the

brown away and there goes your money.

REMOVE THE TOPS of carrots before refrigerating. The top drains the carrots of moisture, making them limp and dry. Tops also should be removed from beets and radishes before refrigeration. Corn, beans, peas and other vegetables will lose sweetness as sugar in their tissues turn to starch. Store them dry and unwashed in plastic bags in the refrigerator. Room-temperature tomatoes are more flavorful than refrigerated ones. Do not ripen tomatoes on the window sill as the sun leeches out some of the Vitamin C.

Bruised produce loses more Vitamin A and C than smooth unblemished specimens. To lessen the likelihood of bruising, use a sharp knife or scissors when trimming, slicing or cutting vegetables.

Jerusalem artichokes, also known as sun chokes, accumulate calories during storage because of a chemical change that takes place in their carbohydrate content. When freshly dug, small tubers contain as few as



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seven calories. After storage, the calorie level can jump to 75.

Store fennel in the refrigerator because the stalks stay fresh only three to four days before drying out and losing their unique flavor. Fennel has 13 calories per half cup and a fair source of Vitamin A, niacin, calcium and iron.

Cabbage contains a compound called calcium pectate, which some studies have shown to lower blood cholesterol levels. Cabbage is a good source of dietary fiber and low in calories. Don't overcook cabbage; it destroys the true taste and texture and bleeds out many valuable vitamins and minerals. Cabbage can be stored one to two weeks in the refrigerator crispier.

EGGPLANT SHOULD BE stored at cool room temperature, about 60 degrees. If the air is dry, keep eggplant in plastic bag to retain moisture. Store one to two days. Get rid of eggplants' bitter taste by salting slices and allowing them to drain in a colander for 30 minutes. Be sure to rinse the slices to get rid of the salt.

Vegetables cooked in the microwave retain more Vitamin C than those boiled. Microwave cooking not only exposes foods to heat for shorter time than boiling but also requires very little water. Cook vegetables only until tender — crisp. To prevent dark spots from forming, add salt only after microwaving vegetables. Don't add salt to green salad

until just before serving. Salt wills and toughens salad greens.

It is best to store most fruits in the refrigerator. Allow melons, avocados and pears to ripen at room temperature, then refrigerate. Ripe oranges sometimes undergo a process known as re-greening. This occurs when a ripe orange pulls some green chlorophyll from its stem and leaves, back into the peel. Such greenish oranges are extra ripe and thus often sweeter than other oranges.

Pink grapefruit is pink because, in part, it contains much more beta-

carotene than white grapefruit. Beta-carotene is the nutrient that turns into Vitamin A inside your body. When refrigerated, grapefruit will keep up to four months.

Take advantage of the detectable selection of fresh fruits and vegetables available. Nutritionally, they are unbeatable — low in calories yet bursting with flavor. They add color and textures and are very versatile in meal planning. Store them correctly so that when you are ready to eat or serve them, they are still top quality, and you will get your money's and nutritional worth.

cooking calendar

• 'Souper' cooks
AAA Michigan Living magazine, the Michigan Restaurant Association and the Greater Michigan Foundation invite state residents to compete in "Souper Bowl II," a contest to find Michigan's best soups and showcase its agricultural products.
Recipes should be marked amateur or professional and carry the chef's name, address and telephone, with directions to mix four servings. Professional chefs should note the name of their restaurant. Mail entries to "Souper Bowl" Contest, AAA Michigan Public Relations, One Auto Club Drive, Dearborn 48126.

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