



# THE HARVEST

Harvesting is something we all look forward to with the planting of each seed. It is the fruit of our labors, our reward for the hard work. For a successful harvest, keep these tips in mind.

## Use 'Harvest Only' Tools and Bins

To avoid cross-contamination and to monitor the cleanliness of your tools, designate certain supplies as "Harvest Only." You will know to pay special attention to these tools when getting them cleaned, dried, and stored. Keep them in a clean space, even in your school building where they will be away from other tools and in a controlled environment.

Be sure that students wash their hands thoroughly before handling food to be harvested. Make sure students have fresh Band-Aids covering any open wound.

## Knowing When It's Ready

Each vegetable and fruit has its own size, length, thickness, and/or color that let's us know when it's ripe. Do some research, ask around, think back to what you see at the market, or taste test to know what is ready to harvest.

## Produce lasts longer when it is harvested under the least amount of stress.

1. If it's going to be warm that day, try to harvest in the early morning or early evening. Many plants get a little soft, floppy, or wilted in the heat of the day. Harvesting in the heat is not only more difficult for people and the plants, but also reduces your shelf life. This really only applies to warm days. If it's cool outside, you can harvest anytime.
2. Check to make sure that the plants you'll be harvesting from are not bone dry. Your food will last longer if it is harvested at a time when the water stores are refreshed. This is especially important for leafy vegetables (kale, greens, lettuce, bok choy), but not as important for vegetables like tomatoes, eggplants, and squash. On the flipside of this, there are certain veggies you want to make sure to harvest when the leaves are dry (no morning dew), including beans and cucumbers. Working with these plants when wet often spreads disease and is generally bad for these plants.
3. Keep harvested produce out of the sun and get it into refrigeration and/or cool shade as soon as you can. If your greens are a little soft, let them soak in cold water in the shade. If they are bunched greens, recut the bottom of the plant to open up the xylem to receive the water.
4. Just like in the fridge, sometimes greens get wilted if they're not covered or in plastic. You can store them inside plastic bags or containers (Rubbermaid bins work) to help them last longer.

## Clean up your Crops for Storage

While carrot tops and turnip greens look great at the farmer's market, they actually keep the produce from storing well long-term. Cut off beet, carrot, turnip, etc. tops before you store them. The green, leafy tops actually start to suck moisture from the root, leading them to become soft or rubbery. The tops also start to breakdown and become slimy.

## Not Everything Needs to be Refrigerated

If you have questions, think back to the grocery store. Is this vegetable usually in the cooler? Getting misted? In baskets away from refrigeration? This will help you decide how to store your veggies.

There are some vegetables with particular storage suggestions. Potatoes develop small amounts of toxins when exposed to sunlight. It is best to store potatoes in the dark and get them out of the sun quickly after harvest. Tomatoes undergo a chemical reaction when exposed to cold temperature. To maintain the flavor and texture of your tomatoes, do not refrigerate them.

## Getting Produce onto Lunch Trays

Springfield Public Schools is excited to use your fresh produce from the school garden.

When you know what, when, and about how much produce you will be harvesting, please email Kim Keller, Director of Operations with Nutrition Services ([kkeller@spsmail.org](mailto:kkeller@spsmail.org)) and Amy Gibbons, Director of Nutrition Services ([aggibbons@spsmail.org](mailto:aggibbons@spsmail.org)).

Please give Nutrition Services about a week's notice so they can develop a recipe to incorporate your produce.

It's also a great idea to connect with the staff in your cafeteria. They'll be your champions through the process, so introduce yourself and your project.



# THE HARVEST - STORAGE TIPS



## Storing Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Best Flavor

### Store in the refrigerator

FRUIT		VEGETABLES				
Apples (more than 7 days)	Berries	Artichokes	Belgian Endive	Cauliflower	Leafy Vegetables	Radishes
Apricots	Cherries	Asparagus	Broccoli	Celery	Leeks	Spinach
Asian pears	Cut Fruit	Green Beans	Brussel Sprouts	Cut Vegetables	Lettuce	Sprouts
	Figs	Beets	Cabbage	Green Onions	Mushrooms	Summer Squashes
	Grapes		Carrots	Herbs (not basil)	Peas	Sweet Corn

1. Place fruits and vegetables in separate, perforated plastic bags.
2. Use within 1-3 days for maximum flavor and freshness.
3. Store each group in different produce drawers in the refrigerator to minimize the detrimental effects of ethylene produced by the fruits on the vegetables.

### Ripen on the counter first, then refrigerate

Avocados      Kiwi      Nectarines      Peaches      Pears      Plums      Plumcots

1. To prevent moisture loss, store fruits and vegetables separately in a paper bag, perforated plastic bag, or ripening bowl on the counter away from sunlight. Ripening fruit in a bowl or paper bag can be enhanced by placing an apple with the fruit to be ripened.
2. After ripening, store in refrigerator and use within 1-3 days.

### Store only at room temperature

FRUIT			VEGETABLES			
Apples (fewer than 7 days)	Citrus fruits	Persimmons	Basil (in water)	Garlic*	Peppers <sup>†</sup>	Tomatoes
Bananas	Mangoes	Pineapple	Cucumber <sup>†</sup>	Ginger	Potatoes*	Winter Squashes
	Melons	Plantain	Eggplant <sup>†</sup>	Jicama	Pumpkins	
	Papayas	Pomegranates		Onions*	Sweet Potatoes*	

1. Many fruits and vegetables should only be stored at room temperatures. Refrigeration can cause cold damage or prevent them from ripening to good flavor and texture. For example, pink tomatoes ripen to a better taste and red color if they are left at room temperature. In the refrigerator, they do not turn red, and even red tomatoes kept in the refrigerator lose their flavor.
  2. Keep away from direct sunlight.
- \*Store garlic, onions, potatoes, and sweet potatoes in a well-ventilated area in the pantry.  
<sup>†</sup>Cucumbers, eggplant, and peppers can be refrigerated for 1-3 days if they are used soon after removing from the refrigerator.

### Cleaning Your Produce

Always keep produce separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Never use detergent or bleach to wash produce. Instead, rinse produce under running tap water immediately prior to use, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Washing too far in advance removes some of nature's natural preservatives. However, head lettuce or leafy greens remain crisper when washed right away and then refrigerated. Packaged fruits and vegetables labeled "ready-to-eat," "washed," or "triple washed" need not be washed. Refrigerate all cut, peeled, or cooked fruits and vegetables within 2 hours.

For information on how to store other fruits and vegetables go to [FruitsAndVeggiesMoreMatters.org](http://FruitsAndVeggiesMoreMatters.org)

Source: UC Davis Postharvest Technology