

# *First Timer's Guide to Buying Fruits and Vegetables*



One of the most frustrating experiences is picking out the perfect fruit or vegetable. So many questions go through your head as you are standing over the mountains of melons and rows of damp produce, that it can be very easy to get lost amid so much. That's where this guide comes in. We're here to give you a basic, comprehensive guide to picking the best and leaving the rest for someone who doesn't know. Because after this, you will be an expert! (Well, kind of . . .)

## Keys to Buying Produce

There are some basic rules to buying produce.

- 1) Seasonality – Buying Produce in their season.
- 2) Texture – How it feels
- 3) Smell – How it smells
- 4) Look – How it looks, color, blemishes, dark spots, etc.



### 1. Seasonality

It is important to know when items are available. Picking good produce starts with getting items in season. No matter how good something is, it's even better when it's in season.

Below is a chart that shows some of the most common fruits and vegetables and when they are in season.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Artichokes												
Asparagus	Best	Good					Best	Best			Best	Best
Beans								Best	Best			
Beets												
Chili Peppers												
Corn	Best	Best	Best								Best	Best
Eggplant												
Green Onions												
Herbs, Fresh												
Jicama												
Leeks												
Onions, Red, White & Yellow												
Peas									Best	Best	Best	Best
Potatoes												
Radishes												
Spinach												
Squash												
Sweet Potatoes												
Turnips						Best	Best					
		Best		Good		Fair		None				

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Apricots	Yellow	Yellow			Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow			Yellow
Blackberries	Green	Green	Green		Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Blueberries	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow
Cantaloupe	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Cherries					Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Cranberries									Green	Green	Green	Yellow
Figs							Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Grapefruit	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Grapes	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Honeydew	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Kiwi	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
Mangos	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Nectarines	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow		Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow		
Oranges	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Papaya	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Peaches	Yellow	Yellow			Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	
Pears	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow		Green	Green	Green	Green
Pineapples	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Plums	Green	Green	Green		Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green		Yellow
Raspberries			Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Strawberries	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow
Tangerines	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green						Green	Yellow	Yellow
Tomatoes, Cherry	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow
Watermelon	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow

Best
  Good
  Fair
  None

## 2. Texture



Is the texture mushy? Are there soft spots? These are things that you should look for as soon as you pick up a fruit or vegetable. These are sure signs that the item is starting to decompose, which means you don't want it.



The texture should be firm, but not hard. If an item is rock hard then it may not be ready for use. Unless it's a winter squash or an apple, then you want it to be hard. This just goes to show you that not all items can be picked by using all of these rules. Some items may only have one or two, like watermelon for example. You actually want to tap it to hear if it makes a hollow sound, and then turn it over and see if the spot where it sits in the dirt is white or more of a yellowish tint. If it is more yellow than white, chances are ripe and ready to eat.



***You have to get touchy when it comes to picking good produce! Don't worry about if people are watching you or not . . . Get the most out of what you're paying for, you deserve it!***

### **3. Smell**

Items like melons or pineapple should give off a smell when you get your nose right up next to them, a sweet melon-like (or pineapple-like) smell. Strawberries and other berries do the same thing, although strawberries seem to be a little bit more potent.

Not all items will give off a noticeable smell, which isn't a bad thing. If you can't really smell it, then it's probably alright. But if you can smell a bad odor coming from it, stay away, the bacteria have already started to grow and you don't want the "smelly" stuff.



### **4. Look**



Of all the ways to identify good produce, this applies to all items and is definitely the best way to tell if you are getting the good stuff. I used to always say to my cooks, "When in doubt, throw it out." The same applies here, if it looks bad, it probably is. Boxes of mushy, wilted, discolored, dull colored or flimsy looking produce is thrown out of grocery stores each day, so feel free to dig deep and pull out the freshest,

highest quality items that are in there, because if you settle, it will show in your finish product.

Look for bright colors and for items that look like they were just picked. Once you start looking for produce, you'll quickly see what I mean, and will be able to easily tell a difference.



## ***Storage***

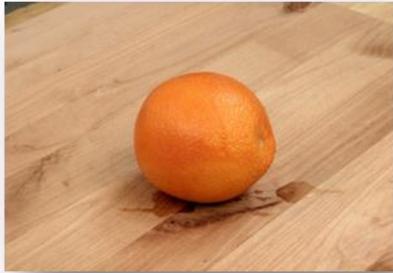
One final note when it comes to buying produce. If you follow all these steps and get the freshest produce out there, but fail to store it correctly, it will all be for naught.



- Make sure that you store items that you would like to be crisp like lettuce, apples, carrots and celery in the bottom of the fridge (usually there is a drawer called the “crisper”).



- Be sure to store fresh herbs and more delicate items like parsley with the other produce items in a way that they do not get smashed.



➤ **Ethylene Gas – Danger!**

*Do not store tomatoes or citrus fruits with the other produce.* This may come as a surprise since most people think that by storing tomatoes in the crisper with everything else will extend the life of the tomatoes, but what they fail to notice is that the ethylene gas (a little something that helps produce to ripen, or over ripen if it gets too much) that the tomatoes emit actually dramatically shortens the life of all their other produce. So don't store items that emit a lot of ethylene gas, i.e. tomatoes and citrus fruits, in with other produce especially more delicate items like fresh herbs and mushrooms.



- **Use Ethylene Gas to your advantage!** Now, it is possible to use that gas to your advantage to speed up the ripening process when it comes to softening up an avocado that might be just a touch too hard, or making those green-tip bananas yellow a lot sooner. Just throw your tomatoes in a paper bag with your unripe items and close the top. Then in just 12 to 24 hours or so, they should be just right.

**Conclusion** Here are just a few tips that should help you in your quest for the perfect fruits and vegetables. By following this guide you will not only get better produce, but you will be able to keep it longer!