

Storing and Freezing Produce

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Properly storing and freezing produce helps maintain its safety, nutrients, and quality. According to the NC State Extension, fresh produce is best stored between 32°F and 55°F in environments with high relative humidity.

Refrigeration Guidelines

Refrigeration is effective because it slows water loss and preserves food quality. For the best results, use a crisper box to maintain higher humidity.

Fruits (Refrigerator)

- **Apples:** 1–2 months
- **Pears:** 2 months
- **Berries:** Up to 7 days
- **Cherries, Grapes, and Peaches:** 2–3 weeks
- **Plums:** 2–4 weeks
- **Melons:** 2 weeks

Vegetables (Refrigerator)

- **Cabbage:** 3–6 weeks
- **Carrots:** 2 weeks
- **Asparagus:** 2–3 weeks
- **Beets:** 2 weeks
- **Broccoli and Cauliflower:** 10–14 days
- **Green Beans and Leafy Greens:** 7–10 days
- **Summer Squash:** 1–2 weeks
- **Okra:** 7–10 days
- **Mushrooms:** 3–4 days

Cool Room Temperature Storage

Certain items prefer cool temperatures over refrigeration, though warm room temperatures will shorten their shelf life. **Note:** Once tomatoes, melons, or leafy greens are cut, they **must** be refrigerated for safety.

- **Potatoes:** 2–3 months

- **Winter Squash:** 1–6 months
- **Apples:** 2–3 weeks
- **Melons:** 1–2 months
- **Tomatoes:** 4–7 days

Freezing for Long-Term Quality

While frozen food can technically be stored safely indefinitely, quality will eventually decline. To maintain the best quality, your freezer should stay at 0°F or lower.

Best Practices

- **Preparation:** Choose high-quality produce and freeze it promptly. Always work with clean hands and equipment.
- **Containers:** Use freezer-specific bags, wrap, foil, jars, or plastic containers.
- **What NOT to Freeze:** Cucumbers, radishes, and watermelon do not freeze well.

The Importance of Blanching

Blanching (briefly exposing produce to boiling water or steam) is critical for frozen vegetables.

- **Enzymes:** Produce has natural enzymes that cause changes in color, flavor, and nutrients.
- **Process:** Blanching inactivates these enzymes and destroys surface microbes.
- **Cooling:** Rapidly cooling the produce in ice after blanching is necessary to prevent it from cooking.