



Storing the Harvest: A Cool Problem

By Mary Tran

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So your garden has turned into a fountain of tomatoes, zucchini, peaches, and cucumbers - how cool is that!

You have them for dinner every night and give some away to neighbors and the local food bank. Now what? You might want to freeze, “can,” or dry your harvest... but that’s a topic for another day, and the El Dorado Master Food Preservers (http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/).

Let’s take a look at storing the harvest in the refrigerator. How cool is too cool?

First, test your refrigerator with a thermometer at different settings and on various shelves and crispers. Most home refrigerators can be maintained at around 45 degrees Fahrenheit (F) or lower. The crisper should be slightly cooler, at a dedicated “fruit fridge” of 35 degrees F.

Second, harvest early in the morning while temperatures are still cool. Veggies should be harvested right when they are ready for eating. Timing of fruit harvest depends on the type of fruit (see <http://ucanr.edu/sites/gardenweb/>). Fruits that have bruises or are very soft should be eaten, not stored.

The third step is to prepare the fruit and veggies for storage.

Fruit: Rinse each piece and dry it. To prevent mold, load the fruit into the fridge in a way that allows good air circulation. Keep the pieces away from the walls and layer them in clean newspaper to reduce fruit-to-fruit infection.

Veggies: Wash the pieces and drain them well. Discard any parts with decay, remove the tops of root crops, and then place them in a crisper. For storage on the refrigerator shelves put them into plastic bags or containers.

Finally, store your harvest at the right temperature and humidity for each type of veggie or fruit.

Cold-Cold (32-40 degrees F for veggies, 32-35 degrees F for fruit):

Fruits: Deciduous-type fruit (apricot, apple, cherry, fig, nectarine, peach, plum, pear)

Veggies (with high humidity, 85-95%):

- Greens (beet greens, chard, collards, kale, lettuce, spinach, mustard greens, turnip greens, watercress) and “bulbs” (endive, escarole, green onions, leaks)
- Also, in a separate crisper from the above or in plastic bags or containers in the fridge main compartment: Mushrooms, Coles (broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage), roots (carrots, turnips, parsnips, radishes, beets), pods (limas, beans, peas), and the following: artichokes, asparagus, celery, rhubarb, and corn unhusked and close to the freezer

Cold (45-55 degrees F, 85-90% humidity)

Veggies: Peppers (bell or chili), snap beans, cucurbits (cucumbers, summer squash) and ripe melons. *Note: Keep these for a maximum of five days and use them right after removing them from the fridge.*

Cool (like a cellar, 50-60 degrees F)

Fruit: For storage of tropical-type fruit, such as olive, citrus, cherimoya, mango, papaya, avocado, feijoa

Veggies: (a) Eggplant, okra, (b) Hard-rind squash, pumpkins, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. *Note: If no cellar-like place is available, store (a) at **Cold** temperature and (b) at **Room Temperature**.*

Room Temperature and away from direct light. (Veggies at 65-70° F, fruit at 68-77° F).

Fruit: For ripening tropical-type fruit (olive, citrus, cherimoya, mango, papaya, avocado).

Veggies: Tomatoes, dry garlic, dry onions, melon (unripe, partly ripe).

Also, here are some general No-Nos:

- Don't put ripe fruits and veggies in the same crisper because the fruit will give off ethylene gas. This can damage many veggies, causing yellowing of greens, russet spotting on lettuce, toughening of asparagus, sprouting of potatoes, and bitter taste in carrots.
- Don't keep Cole crops more than a few days in the fridge because they give off strong odors.
- Don't store root crops next to fruits and leafy veggies because they may cause off-flavors (but is OK if they are all in separate bags).
- Don't put wet fruit into the refrigerator.

Happy harvesting!

Join this Saturday's free Master Gardener class, “From Trash to Treasures,” and Master Gardener Kristin Rankin will amaze you with the throw-away items that she turns into garden treasures. The September 7th class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville, California.

Plan to come to the Master Gardener's upcoming Fall Plant Sale on Saturday, September 28, 2013 at 8:00 a.m. in the Veterans Memorial Building Parking lot. Plants grown by master gardeners are sold at reasonable prices – there will be lots of fall and winter varieties, perennials and much more. Proceeds benefit the County Demonstration Garden under construction.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmers Markets, or Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find Master Gardeners and Master Food Preservers on Facebook.