

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Don't Let The Veggies Go to Waste

While we don't have to worry about fruits and vegetables going to our waists, I do get questions about how to avoid so much waste. People with the best of intentions buy fresh produce, bring it home, and a few days later go to use it, only to find that it has molded, turned to mush or otherwise become at least unappetizing if not completely inedible. A comic microbiologist once said that molds are just trying to protect their next meal from us when they make it look so bad!

If you don't want to, or are unable to, shop for fruit and vegetables every couple of days, how do keep them in good shape until you are able to use them? Here are some pointers, and some alternatives.

Probably the most important is keep them dry. Don't wash fruits or vegetables until you are ready to use them. Molds, the most common spoilers of fresh produce, need water to grow. So by keeping things dry, the mold won't get a head start. If you wash and dry those luscious fresh strawberries, there are still likely to be drops of water down by the stem or under the leaves. That is where the mold and rot will start. Wait until you are ready to chop them before you wash them.

Keeping vegetables dry might be a problem when they are wet from the misting spray in the grocery. Do your best to dry them, or let them air dry before you store them. The spray is useful because a limp, wilted, dried-out stalk of celery or carrot is also easier pickings for mold. But at home you can control the moisture by keeping the vegetables refrigerated in a plastic bag with holes in it. If you don't have a perforated

bag, like the ones grapes come in, you can leave the bag open, or poke some holes in it. Keeping them in the crisper drawer will also help hold moisture around them and prevent them from drying out.

Greens and leafy vegetables, asparagus and celery, green beans and peas, cucumbers, mushrooms, bell peppers, green onions, and sweet potatoes all keep much longer if kept in a humid plastic bag. Just don't seal the bag shut! Berries and cherries, peaches and nectarines (once they are ripe), grapes and cantaloupes are fruits that benefit from the humidity too. In the refrigerator they should keep for several days or up to a week.

Potatoes, carrots, turnips and parsnips, onions and garlic will keep for weeks or maybe over a month in the refrigerator. Citrus fruit, mangoes and unripe melons will also keep for weeks, if you keep them dry. Moist melons become moldy melons!

Of course, tomatoes and bananas don't need the refrigerator at all. If a few get too ripe on the counter before you can use them, stick them in the freezer. Frozen ripe bananas are still good for banana bread or pancakes. Frozen tomatoes can go into a spaghetti sauce without a problem.

If all of this is not enough, do not feel guilty about using canned or frozen produce. In many cases the canned or frozen things have just as much of their vitamins and minerals as the fresh ones do. In some cases, such as vitamin A and some of the antioxidants and other phytonutrients, we actually get more from the canned or cooked food than we do from the fresh. So if you are willing to open a can, or keep a bag of frozen mixed vegetables in the freezer, go for it! You'll be much better off with them than with no fruits or vegetables at all!

Here's a one-dish dinner that can use frozen or fresh broccoli. You could also

use cauliflower if you prefer, or brussels sprouts. Whichever you choose, enjoy!

Lemon Dilly Chicken and Broccoli

1 fryer chicken, cut up	½ cup lemon juice
½ tsp salt	1/4 cup oil
1 tsp dried dill	1 tsp paprika
1 10-oz pkg frozen broccoli or 1 head fresh broccoli	

Preheat oven to 350° F. For less fat, remove skin from chicken pieces. Arrange on flat baking dish. Mix remaining ingredients except broccoli. Pour half over chicken. Cover with foil or pan lid. Bake for 35 min. While chicken bakes, steam the broccoli until just barely tender. Drain. In bowl toss with remaining dressing. After chicken has baked for 35 min, remove lid, add broccoli to pan around chicken pieces, and continue baking another 10 min or until chicken is done. Serves 4-6.

To be safe, use a thermometer in a thigh or breast. It should read 170° F when done.

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