

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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It was a rough season for our local tomato growers and those across the country. Too many people got sick, that's true. But even though it turned out that tomatoes were not to blame, our local growers alone lost millions of dollars when people stopped buying tomatoes. How long will it take before buyers decide to trust fresh tomatoes? The sales of fresh spinach are still not completely back to where they were before the outbreak from that crop.

On the other hand, doctors and dietitians keep telling us to eat more fruits and vegetables. They're good for us. They keep us healthy. They help prevent cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, and dozens of other illnesses. What are we supposed to do?! How do we eat and stay safe?

The first and surest way to stay safe is to only eat cooked vegetables and fruits. That includes using canned produce too. The heat of cooking or canning kills any bacteria that might be there. Of course the flavor and texture are not the same. No one can argue that a plate of wilted lettuce is as nice as a crisp green salad.

It's quicker to simply open a can and reheat the veggies. Or eat them cold right out of the can if you prefer. Canned or cooked fruits and vegetables still provide most of the nutritional value of fresh if they are still crisp-tender. If they are boiled till they are limp, cooked till they are grey or otherwise overcooked, then yes, there will be a significant loss of certain vitamins and possibly minerals.

If you want fresh, crisp veggies and fruit, what are your choices? First, be very selective in the store. Look for produce that was grown in Florida. That's no guarantee that it's safer, only that there was less chance for contamination along the shorter distance it traveled. Some months you will have no choice but to buy from out of state, so here are your next steps.

Look over the produce carefully. If possible choose from loose produce instead of prepackaged trays, so that you can look at all sides of each piece. They don't have to be perfectly shaped or colored, but you do want pieces that are not bruised, cracked, cut or otherwise damaged. Any place there is damage is a place where bacteria or mold will get a head start growing.

Now, take it home quickly. The less time the fruits or vegetables spend in the heat, the better. So, don't stop at the video store or the kid's soccer game. Don't leave the bag of groceries sitting on the counter. Get them in the refrigerator as soon as possible. Ready to eat salad mixes and other cut produce especially needs the cold.

For things that don't need to be refrigerated, keep them cool and dry in air conditioning. Keep them in a clean basket, bowl or tray. You want to allow air to circulate around them. Do not wash produce until you are about to use it. Moisture will allow mold and bacteria to grow, so keep it as dry as possible.

When you are ready to use your fresh fruit and vegetables, wash your hands first with soap and water. Then rinse the produce with running water. Soap, vinegar and commercial products do not help any more than water. Rub lightly, or for tough-skinned produce use a brush to scrub it. Trim the end where the stem or leaves used to be. This is where bacteria are most likely to hide.

Finally, be sure to chop your fruit or veggies with a clean knife on a clean cutting board. Wash your hands before and after you've handled any different foods so you don't spread contamination from one to another. Now, eat and enjoy!

Here's a Florida version of a homestyle favorite, cole slaw. Remove the outer layer of leaves before you rinse and shred the cabbage. For some extra color add some shredded carrots or finely diced sweet red pepper. This serves 6.

#### Florida Sunrise Slaw

4 cups peeled orange sections (or drained, canned mandarin oranges)

3 cups shredded cabbage ½ cup raisins (or dried cranberries)

1 cup fat free sour cream 1 Tbsp sugar or sweetener

½ tsp salt 1 Tbsp poppy seeds

Combine sour cream, sugar, salt and poppy seeds in large bowl. Add fruit and vegetables and toss lightly. Keep refrigerated until serving time.

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