

Shopping for Vegetables

Tips and tricks for the grocery store Written by: Mateja Savoie Roskos and Amy Spielmaker

1 Asparagus

How to determine quality? Choose stalks that have tightly closed tips. Usually thinner stalks will be less tough and stringy than thick stalks.

When is it in season? Asparagus is in season in the spring.

How to store? Wrap a wet paper towel around the bottom of asparagus stalks. This will help keep them fresh. Put the asparagus in a plastic bag and place in the crisper section of the refrigerator.

2 Broccoli

How to determine quality? Choose broccoli heads with tight, green florets and firm stalks. The broccoli should feel heavy for its size. The cut ends of the stalks should be fresh and moist looking. Avoid broccoli with dry or browning stem ends or yellowing florets.

When is it in season? Broccoli is in season in the winter.

How to store? Store broccoli unwashed in the refrigerator in an open plastic bag for 3-5 days.

3 Brussels Sprouts

How to determine quality? Brussels sprouts should have very tightly packed leaves. They should also be round and heavy for their size.

When is it in season? Brussels sprouts are in season in the winter.

How to store? Store Brussels sprouts in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

4 Cabbage

How to determine quality? Look for a firm body, and crisp, richly colored leaves. Avoid cabbage with a cracked head, pale color, or wilted leaves.

When is it in season? Cabbage is in season in the winter.

How to store? Keep cabbage in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

5 Carrots

How to determine quality? Look for carrots that are about ½ inch in diameter; these are young and the sweetest. Carrots should have a bright color, firm body, and smooth skin. The leaves, if attached, should be crisp and green.

When are they in season? Carrots are in season in the summer.

How to store? Whole carrots should be kept in a bag in the refrigerator. Cut carrots can be put in a container filled with water and kept in the refrigerator. This will help them stay fresh longer.

6 Cauliflower

How to determine quality? Cauliflower heads should be compact, white, and firm, with tightly clustered florets. The leaves should be bright green.

When is it in season? Cauliflower is in season in the autumn.

How to store? Cauliflower should be kept in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

7 Corn

How to determine quality? Ripe, just-picked ears of corn have a tightly attached husk that is pliable, healthy and green. The kernels should ooze a milky liquid when stabbed; if they are dry or watery, the ear is not good. The kernels should be plump and arranged in neat, tight rows that extend the full length of the ear.

When is it in season? Corn is in season in the autumn.

How to store? Corn should be stored in the refrigerator crisper with husks still on. Corn also freezes well.

8 Cucumbers

How to determine quality? Cucumbers should have a heavy and firm body. Small, skinny cucumbers will have firmer, sweeter flesh and softer seeds.

When are they in season? Cucumbers are in season in the summer.

How to store? Cucumbers should be kept in the refrigerator. Cucumbers can absorb the flavor of nearby foods, so it is important to store cucumbers away from strong flavors, like onions.

9 Green Beans

How to determine quality? Green beans should be brightly colored and snap easily when bent. Avoid beans that have visible blemishes or are stiff.

When are they in season? Green beans are in season in the summer.

How to store? Green beans should be kept in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

10 Jicama

How to determine quality? Choose jicama roots that are small in size. As the root grows larger, its flavor decreases and its texture toughens. Jicama should have smooth, shiny, and unblemished skins. Avoid jicama with green discoloration around the stem end as this is an indicator of mold.

When is it in season? Jicama is in season in the summer.

How to store? Jicama should be stored in a cool, dry place and left uncovered. Moisture can lead to rotting, so avoid putting jicama in the refrigerator. Remove any soggy or discolored flesh before use.

11 Onions

How to determine quality? Green onions should have crisp, bright green tops and a firm white base. Dry onions should be firm and free of cuts and blemishes.

When are they in season? Onions are in season in the winter.

How to store? Rubber bands and damaged leaves on green onions should be discarded immediately. Green onions can be wrapped in a damp paper towel and placed in the refrigerator. Dry onions should be kept in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place. Once cut, they should be stored in the refrigerator.

12 Peas

How to determine quality? Peas should be plump and bright green, not white. Peas with small pods and seeds are the most tender and sweet.

When is it in season? Peas are in season in the summer.

How to store? Peas can be stored in their pods in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Peas removed from their pods can be blanched and frozen.

13 Peppers

How to determine quality? Look for peppers with a firm body, thick walls, smooth skin, and a bright and shiny color. The colored bell peppers (red, yellow, and orange) are mature and sweeter bell peppers while the green bell peppers are immature and slightly bitter.

When are they in season? Peppers are in season in the autumn.

How to store? Peppers should be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator crisper.

14 Potatoes and Sweet Potatoes

How to determine quality? Potatoes should have a firm body and be heavy for their size. They should be free from black or soft spots, sprouts, wrinkles, or greenish color.

When are they in season? Potatoes are in season in the winter. Sweet potatoes are in season in the autumn.

How to store? Store potatoes in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area. They should be placed in a perforated plastic or burlap bag.

15 Rhubarb

How to determine quality? Rhubarb should have firm, crisp stalks with a hint of red. The edges should not be brown or dried out. The leaves, if they're still attached, should not be wilted.

When is it in season? Rhubarb is in season in the spring.

How to store? The leaves of the rhubarb should be removed. Wash and dry the stalks and cut off any imperfections. Wrap the stalks with a damp paper towel and place in the refrigerator.

16 Root Vegetables

(beet, parsnip, radish, celery root, rutabaga)

How to determine quality? Look for small-to-medium-sized roots; large roots are often tough and woody. Flesh should be smooth and firm. Root vegetables should have a rich color and have healthy, unwilted leaves.

When are they in season? Root vegetables are in season in the winter.

How to store? If the root vegetable still has leaves connected, keep them attached. Place the root in a perforated plastic bag (or open plastic bag) in the refrigerator crisper.

17 Salad Greens

(endive, bok choy, radicchio, spinach, any lettuce)

How to determine quality? Look for healthy, dark green leaves. Smaller spinach leaves indicate a more tender and sweet flavor. Lettuce leaves should be crisp and compact.

When are they in season? Salad greens are in season in the spring.

How to store? Store in the crisper section of the refrigerator.

18 Summer Squash

(zucchini, yellow squash)

How to determine quality? Yellow squash and zucchini are at their best when they're small (about 4 inches long). They should feel firm, heavy for their size, and have a bright and healthy skin. Avoid summer squash with dull or hard skin, an oversized body, soft spots, or blemishes.

When is it in season? Summer squash is in season in the summer.

How to store? Store summer squash in a plastic bag in the crisper section of the refrigerator.

19 Tomato

How to determine ripeness and quality? Since tomatoes are a fruit, they will continue to ripen after being picked. The skin of the tomato will be shiny, not matte, when it is ripe. The skin should be a deep color and be slightly soft to the touch.

When are they in season? Tomatoes are in season in the summer.

How to store? Tomatoes should be stored at room temperature. If kept in the refrigerator, tomatoes will not ripen properly and will become mushy.

20 Winter Greens

(kale, chard)

How to determine quality? The leaves of winter greens should be firm and deeply colored with stems that are moist and strong.

When are they in season? Winter greens are in season in the winter.

How to store? Store winter greens in the refrigerator in an airtight bag. The longer winter greens are stored, the more bitter they will become.

21 Winter Squash

(butternut, acorn, spaghetti)

How to determine quality? The skin of winter squash should be hard and rigid. The skin should be dull and rich in color without blemishes, cracks, or soft spots. The stem should be dry and firm.

When is it in season? Winter squash is in season in the winter.

How to store? Store winter squash in a cool, dark, well-ventilated area. Do not wrap winter squash in plastic bags.