



KEEPING SUMMER FRUITS AND VEGETABLES SAFE

Harvest season is underway and a great time to buy fresh fruits and vegetables from farmers' markets, your favourite grocery stores or roadside produce stands. Fruits and vegetables are healthy choices but they can present some risks. Many foodborne illnesses have been linked to fruits and vegetables that were contaminated by bacteria, viruses or parasites at some point during growing, harvesting, packaging or shipping.

Here are some ways to reduce the risk of illness when buying, storing, washing and preparing fruits and vegetables.

Buying and storing fruits and vegetables (also called produce)

- Look for fresh, firm produce that is free from bruises, mould and decay. Buy small amounts that can be eaten in a few days.
- Check best before dates when buying bags or packages of "ready-to-eat" produce or salad mixes. Store in the refrigerator and use up quickly.
- In the grocery cart, meat, poultry and fish should not touch produce. To be on the safe side, put meat, poultry and fish in the plastic bags that are often available at the meat counter.
- At home, refrigerate leafy greens and any cut or prepared fruits and vegetables. Put meat, poultry, and fish in shallow pans on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator. This will stop meat juices from dripping on produce and other food.
- Look for pasteurized juice and cider at roadside stands, farmers' markets or grocery stores. Check the product label or ask the producer or retailer. In recent years, unpasteurized juice or cider has been linked to foodborne illness outbreaks of E.coli O157:H7 and Salmonella infections in the United States and Canada. For more information, click on [Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider, It's Your Health, Health Canada](#).



Washing fruits and vegetables

- Start clean. Everything that touches produce should be clean including: hands, sinks, bowls, knives, vegetable peelers, produce brushes, colanders and cutting boards. Tip: Have two cutting boards; one for fruits and vegetables and one just for meat, poultry and fish.

- Wash fruits and vegetables before preparing or eating, to reduce the risk of illness from bacteria, viruses and parasites that may be on the outer surfaces.
 - Many fruits and vegetables, including melons and leafy green vegetables, are grown in close contact with the ground which could be a source of bacteria and other microbes. Also, fruits and vegetables often come from other parts of the world and have been in contact with many surfaces and hands along the way.
- Packaged and sealed salad mixes labeled “washed”, “triple washed”, or “ready-to-eat” do not need washing unless it says so on the label.
- Give fruits and vegetables a thorough washing, rubbing, brushing or rinsing in clean running water. Tip: To reduce the risk of cross contamination, wash produce first and then prepare meat, poultry and fish.
 - Use a scrub brush on hard surfaced produce such as potatoes, yams, squash, melons, carrots, parsnips, turnips and avocados. Wash apples and tomatoes by rubbing the surfaces with your hands. Wash the stem and blossom ends too.
 - Discard the outer leaves before washing leafy vegetables that grow close to the ground, such as lettuce and cabbage.
 - For produce like lettuce, spinach and kale, separate and wash individual leaves under running water. They can also be soaked in clean water for a few seconds and then rinsed. Make sure the bowl or sink used for soaking is clean.
 - Leafy herbs like parsley, mint and cilantro also grow close to the ground and usually need several rinses in clean water.
- Wash produce even if the skin or rind will not be eaten. There is less risk of moving any surface bacteria or viruses to the inside when cutting or peeling produce. Tip: Bananas need washing too, especially if an unpeeled whole banana is going to be cut in half and served to children or seniors.
- Air dry washed produce on paper towels, clean cloth towels or in clean colanders or strainers.
- Cover and refrigerate cut and peeled raw fruits and vegetables within two hours.
- Buying fresh fiddlehead ferns for the first time? They should not be eaten raw. For information on preparing and cooking fiddlehead ferns, click on [Food Safety Measures for Fiddleheads, Advisories, Warnings, and Recalls, Health Canada](#).



Cleaning Up:

- Wash kitchen tools (including the produce brush) with soap and hot water or put them in the dishwasher. After washing sinks, counter tops and any kitchen tools

that can't be put in the dishwasher, it is a good idea to sanitize them with a solution of 1/4 tsp bleach mixed in 2 cups (500 mL) of water.

- Tip: Change kitchen dish cloths and hand towels at least twice a week, and always immediately after preparing raw meat, poultry and fish. It's an easy and inexpensive way to boost food safety in the kitchen.

For more information, click on:

[Food Safety Facts for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)

[Safe Handling of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, It's Your Health, Health Canada](#)

[Produce Safety, Food and Nutrition, Health Canada](#)



Preserving fruits and vegetables? Stay current

Preserving methods change, and old home canning recipes may not be safe. For example, sealing jams and jellies with wax is no longer safe. Current guidelines require jams and jellies to be processed in a boiling water bath.

For information on preserving foods, click on the links below:

[ATCO Blue Flame Kitchen](#)

[National Center for Home Food Preservation, University of Georgia](#)

For more information, please call Alberta Health Services, Environmental Health Program at 403 943-2295, or go to:

<http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/publichealth/envhealth/>