

A-Z

Food Storage Tips

Tips for storing food so that it lasts longer and gets wasted less.

Why worry about preventing wasted food? Although composting is a great way to deal with inevitable food scraps like banana peels, it is much better to eat the food we can than to compost it. Prevention helps the environment as well as our budgets. After all, it takes a lot of resources to get food from the fields to our homes.

While no one buys food with the intention of throwing it away, based on recent estimates, the average household in Saint Paul wastes up to \$96 worth of once edible food every month!

Storing your food properly can make it last much longer to help you save money and reduce waste. Eureka Recycling has assembled tips and tools to help on www.makedirtnotwaste.org. Try out a tip. Love it? Hate it? Have a better idea? Log in so you can rate it and leave a comment, or add one of your own.

General storage tips to keep in mind:

Keep apples, bananas, citrus, and tomatoes away from other produce—they give off ethylene gas that makes other produce ripen/deteriorate faster.

Untie all bunches (herbs, greens, etc.) to allow the produce to breathe.

The length of time that the food will last depends on how fresh it was when you bought it. Local, in-season produce will last much longer than something that has been shipped a long way. For all perishable food, use your nose and eyes to determine if it has gone bad. Sometimes, it may just be past its prime for raw eating but can be cooked—pears, apples, berries, or other fruit can be made into sauces, crisps, or cobblers. Stale bread can be kept for breadcrumbs, French toast, or bread pudding.

All frozen things should be in an airtight container with as much air removed as possible. Air contains moisture that creates ice crystals that “burn” the food or make it deteriorate faster. Freezing in a flat, rectangular, clear, glass container works so you can see your food and stack containers. Don't forget to label when it went in the freezer!

Many of these foods can be dried in a food dehydrator or canned with a hot water bath canner or a pressure canner. Check out a dehydrating or a canning guide to find the best recipes for preserving large quantities of produce.

For best results, keep your fridge between 37° F and 40° F, and your freezer between 0° F and 2° F.

Use your fridge's crisper drawer. The higher humidity environment benefits many vegetables by helping them last longer. If you can adjust the humidity setting on your crisper drawer, set it on high humidity for leafy greens or on low for non-leafy vegetables like carrots and cucumbers.



Apples



Store apples in the **fridge** to extend shelf life.

One bad apple can ruin the whole bunch, so eat up the bruised ones first!

For longer storage, store in a cardboard box covered with a damp towel.

Artichokes



Place in an **airtight container** with a damp towel for moisture and store in the **fridge**.

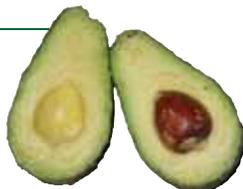
Asparagus



Store asparagus in the **fridge**.

- Trim the base of the stalks and place upright in a jar filled with an inch of water.
- Or, wrap the cut ends of the stalks in a moist paper towel or rag.

Avocados



To speed up ripening, place in a paper bag and place an apple in the bag with them.

Once ripe, store avocados in the **fridge**.

Mix avocados or guacamole with a little lemon or lime juice or leave the pit in to slow browning.

Bananas



Store bananas **on the counter away from other fruit**. They give off ethylene gas, which speeds ripening in other produce.

Bananas can be **frozen** with or without their peel and used later in baked goods or smoothies.

Basil



Basil is a warm weather crop and turns black quickly in the fridge. Store **on the counter** in a glass of water like a cut flower with the stem in the water, or wrapped in a dry paper towel in an **airtight container**.

Beans, cooked/canned



Store unused cooked beans in the **fridge** in their liquid or water.

You can **freeze** cooked beans in liquid. Put cooked beans in a can/freeze jar and fill with cooking liquid or water.

Beans, dry



© photobunny (Flickr)

Store dry, uncooked beans in an **airtight container** in a cool, dry place.

Beans, green

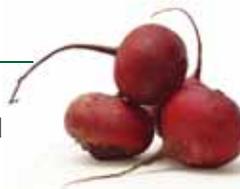


© Luis Tamayo (Flickr)

Store unwashed green beans in the **fridge** in an **airtight container**. Wet beans will develop black spots and decay quickly.

Green beans can be **frozen**, either raw or blanched. Freeze on a cookie sheet in a single layer and transfer to an **airtight container**.

Beets



Store beets in the **fridge** (greens removed) in an **airtight container** with a paper towel inside to absorb moisture.

You can **freeze** beets by blanching them and storing in an airtight container.

Don't forget to eat the beet greens! Check out "Greens, cooking" for more information on how to store them.

Berries



Before storing berries, remove any spoiled or crushed fruits, and store unwashed in an **airtight container**. Try not to put them into too many layers because berries are fragile.

Don't wash until ready to eat—any added moisture encourages mold. If you must wash them, we have heard that adding a little white vinegar to the water helps keep them from deteriorating as quickly.

Store excess berries in the freezer in an **airtight container**. Freeze them on a cookie sheet first before transferring to a container to avoid sticking.

Bitter melon

Store in an **airtight container** in the crisper drawer of the **fridge**.

Can be frozen if sautéed first. Store in an **airtight container** in the **freezer**.



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Brussels sprouts

If Brussels sprouts are on the stalk leave them on that stalk. Put it in the **fridge** or leave it in a cold place.

If they are loose, store them in an open container in the **fridge** with a damp towel on top.



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Bread & Breadcrumbs

Store fresh bread wrapped in a cotton bag or wax paper in a bread box or metal tin **on the counter**.



To freshen up a day-old loaf, hold it very briefly under a running cold tap. Give it a good shake and pop in a hot oven for about 10 minutes; it will be as soft and crusty as freshly baked bread.

Store sliced bread in an **airtight container** in the **freezer**. Thaw in the microwave or toaster.

Store stale bread, crusts, and crumbs in the **freezer** to use for making breadcrumbs. Store breadcrumbs in an **airtight container** in the **freezer**.

Broccoli

Store broccoli loosely in the **fridge**. You can wrap in a damp towel or cotton bag.



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The stalks can be eaten, too! Store the stalks in an **airtight container** with a paper towel. Peel and shred them to make a broccoli slaw or cut them and put them into soups.

Broccoli can be blanched and put in the **freezer** in an **airtight container**.

Brown sugar

Store brown sugar in an **airtight container**.



Try keeping a few marshmallows or a slice of bread on top of the sugar to keep it from drying out and getting hard. Or, a brown sugar “teddy bear” clay disc might be a good option to help keep your sugar from getting hard. Soak the disc in water for 15 minutes once or twice a year.

Butter

When storing butter in the **fridge**, don't keep it in the door (often where the “Butter” compartment is) because that is often warmer than other parts of the fridge, and could make it spoil more quickly.



Butter can be stored in the **freezer**. Cut it into tablespoon-sized chunks and store in an **airtight container**.

Cabbage

Store cabbage in the crisper drawer of the **fridge**.



Peel off outer leaves if they start to wilt. Eat cabbage first as it goes bad more quickly than other produce.

Carrots

Cut the tops off carrots to keep them fresh longer.

Store carrots in the **fridge** either in a container of water or unwashed in an **airtight container** in the crisper drawer with plenty of moisture.



If you have a lot of carrots at the end of the season, store them in buckets of damp sand in a **cool, dry place**.

Cauliflower

Store cauliflower in an **airtight container** in the **fridge**, but eat cauliflower first as it goes bad more quickly than other produce.



© Horia Varflan (Flickr)

Celery

Store celery in the **fridge** either in a container of water or in an **airtight container**.

Celery leaves can be washed, dried, and **frozen**, then crumbled into soups and stews for extra flavor.



Cereal

Store cereal in a dry place in an **airtight container**.

If cereals have gone a little soft or stale, lay them out on a cookie sheet and pop them in the oven for a bit to remove some of the excess moisture.

If you have several boxes of cereal but not enough in any one box to be worthwhile, mix them all together, blend them in a food processor, and use like breadcrumbs, as toppings for muffins or baked goods, or on ice cream!



© Horia Varlan (Flickr)

Cheese

Store cheese in wax paper, butcher paper, or parchment paper to allow it to breathe and not get moldy. Store it in a cold part of your **fridge**.

Hard and semi-hard cheeses like Parmesan, cheddar, and Swiss can be grated or cubed and kept in the **freezer**. After being in the freezer, cheese is best used in cooking.

Soft and semi-soft cheeses do not freeze well.



Cherries

Store cherries in the **fridge**.

Don't wash until ready to eat—any added moisture encourages mold. If you must wash them before storing, try using a mixture of one part white vinegar and ten parts water to help keep them from deteriorating as quickly.

Pitted and washed cherries can be stored in the **freezer** by laying them in a single layer on a cookie sheet, freezing them, and then transferring to an **airtight container**.



© judy_and_ed (Flickr)

Citrus

(Includes grapefruit, lemons, limes, oranges, etc.)

Keep citrus loose or in an open container in the **fridge**. Never store citrus in an airtight container.

If you have a cut lemon or lime, wrap the cut end in a damp paper towel.

Juice and peels can be stored in the **freezer**. Freeze juice in ice cube trays and store peels in an **airtight container** in the **freezer**.

Juice from citrus can be used to keep apples, pears, and avocados from going brown.



Coconut milk

Coconut milk can be kept in the **freezer**. Freeze it in ice cube trays then transfer cubes to an **airtight container**.



Corn

Leave husks on fresh corn and store open in the **fridge**. Eat as soon as you can, as it loses flavor and texture quickly.

Buy corn when it's in season and store it in the **freezer** by blanching, cutting from the cob, and transferring to an **airtight container**.



Cream

When storing cream in the **fridge**, don't put it in the door, because that is often warmer than other parts of the fridge, and could make it spoil more quickly.

Cream can be **frozen**.

- Lightly whip the cream before freezing to prevent it from getting grainy.
- Freeze in ice cube trays then transfer cubes to an **airtight container**.



Cucumbers

Store cucumbers in the **fridge** by standing them upright in a container of water with the stalk down.

Wrap in a moist towel in the **fridge**.



Dates

The drier varieties of dates (like Deglet Noor) can be stored out **on the counter** in a bowl or paper bag.

The more moist variety of dates (like Medjool) need to be kept in the **fridge** either in cloth or in a paper bag, keeping the moisture away from the skin of the dates.



Eggs

When storing eggs in the **fridge**, write the date you bought them on the shells or cartons to make sure to use the older ones first.



To test if an egg is still good, try dropping one in a glass of water.

If the egg...

- stays at the bottom, flat or at an angle, it is fresh.
- stands on its pointed end at the bottom, it is still safe to eat but best used for baking and making hard-boiled eggs.
- floats, it's stale and best discarded.

You can **freeze** eggs, just not in the shell. They are best if frozen in portions you will use, like in ice cube trays. If freezing whole eggs or yolks, whip up the yolk with a fork and put in tray. If freezing just yolks, to keep them from clumping, add a ½ tsp. of salt per cup of yolks or 1 tbsp. of sugar per cup of yolks. You can freeze whites as they are. Store portions in an **airtight container**.

Eggplant

Store eggplant unwashed in the crisper drawer of the **fridge**.



© Alice Henneman (Flickr)

Eggplant doesn't like any extra moisture.

Eggplant can be peeled, blanched, cut, and **frozen** in an **airtight container**.

Fennel

Place in the **fridge** in a closed container with a little water or upright in a cup of water (like celery).



Figs

Keep figs in a paper bag or on a plate in the **fridge** and away from moisture. Store in a single layer as they are very fragile.



© Emilie Hardman (Flickr)

Flours

Keep in **airtight containers** in a **cool, dark place**.



Flours, especially flours with more oils and higher protein levels (like whole wheat) last longer in the **fridge** or **freezer**.

Garlic

Store in a **cool, dark place** away from produce that gives off ethylene gas.



© Marco Bernardini (Flickr)

Try storing garlic in an old nylon stocking: place one head of garlic in the stocking, tie a knot, and add another, etc. When the stocking is filled, hang it in a cool, dark place.

Grapes

Remove spoiled or soft grapes and do not wash them before storing in the **fridge** in an **airtight container**.



Grapes can be **frozen** to use in smoothies or as a frozen treat. Freeze in a single layer on a cookie sheet, and then store the frozen grapes in an **airtight container**.

Greens, cooking

(Includes all greens generally eaten cooked: beet greens, bok choy, broccoli raab, collards, dandelion greens, kale, mustard greens, spinach, Swiss chard, tat soi, and turnip greens)



Remove any bands, twist ties, etc.

Greens must be kept in an **airtight container** with a damp cloth to keep them from drying out.

Hardier greens like kale, collards, and chard even do well with their stems in a cup of water **on the counter** or **fridge**.

Greens, salad

(Includes all greens eaten fresh: arugula, corn mache, endive, lettuce, mizuna, radicchio, sorrel, and spinach)



Store salad greens in the **fridge** in an **airtight container** with a damp paper towel.

Soak leaves that have gone limp for 30 minutes in cold water to revive crispness.

Green onions (or Scallions)

Store in the **fridge** wrapped in a damp towel or upright in a glass of water just to cover the white parts.

Make sure to remove any bands on the bunch.

Green onions can be **frozen** to be used cooked later. Chop and freeze on a cookie sheet and store in an **airtight container**.



Herbs

Store herbs (other than basil) in the **fridge** upright in jars (stems down) filled with 1-2 inches of water.

Herbs can be **frozen** by chopping and freezing in ice cube trays full of olive oil.



Leeks

Store leeks in an open container in the crisper drawer of the **fridge** wrapped in a damp cloth or in a shallow cup of water (just so the very bottom of the leek is covered with water).



Meat, Poultry, and Fish

(Includes: bacon, beef, chicken, ham, pork, turkey)

Keep all meat in the coldest part of the **fridge**: the bottom shelf.

Fresh meat will only keep for 1-2 days in the **fridge**. If not using within 1-2 days, **freeze** in an **airtight container**.

Freeze individual portions or strips of bacon between wax paper and in an **airtight container**.

Keep raw meat, poultry, or fish in the **freezer** and thaw it out in the fridge a day or two before you will cook it.

Cooked meat can keep up to 4-5 days in the **fridge**.

Keep bones and carcasses to make soup or stock. Keep them in the **freezer** to use later.



Melons

Store in a **cool, dry place** out of the sun.

Once ripe, store melons in the **fridge**.

Cubed melon can be **frozen** on trays before transferring to an **airtight container**, and then used in drinks and smoothies.



Milk

When storing milk in the **fridge**, don't put it in the door, because that is often warmer than other parts of the fridge, and could make it spoil more quickly.

Skim or low fat milk can be **frozen** in glass jars. It may be better used in baking than for drinking because it often separates. Be sure to leave room in the jar for the milk to expand.



Mushrooms

Keep mushrooms in a paper bag in the **fridge** to avoid getting "slimy."

Mushrooms can be sautéed and then **frozen**.



Nuts

Nuts can be stored in the **freezer, fridge**, or a **cool, dry place**. They will last longer in a colder place.

Nuts take on other flavors easily, so store away from high-odor foods.

Nut butters should be stored in the **fridge** to extend shelf life.



© s58y (Flickr)

Oils

Store oils in a **cool, dark place** in a glass, ceramic or non-reactive metal container (like stainless steel). Keep away from your stove or any warm place.

If you keep oil in a dark basement, you may want to keep a small, opaque container of oil in in your kitchen for easy access.



Okra

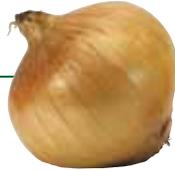
Okra doesn't like humidity. Store with a dry towel in an **airtight container**. Eat as soon as you can after purchasing, as it doesn't last as long as other produce.



© avlyxz (Flickr)

Onions

Store whole onions in a **cool, dark place** somewhere slightly warmer than the fridge. Good air circulation is best, so don't stack them.



© Dubravko Sorli (Flickr)

Try storing onions in an old nylon stocking: place one in the stocking, tie a knot, and add another, etc. When the stocking is filled, hang it in a cool dark place.

Store partially used onions in the **fridge** in an **airtight container**, leaving the papery outer layer on.

Onions cause potatoes to sprout, so keep them separate.

Pasta

Store dry pasta in an **airtight container**.

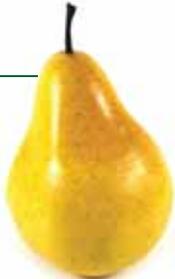
Cooked pasta can be **frozen** in individual- or meal-sized portions.



Pears

Store pears in the **fridge** to extend shelf life.

Fruits that are overripe or damaged can still be used in sauces or baked goods if you do not want to freeze them. Look up recipes in your cookbooks or online.



© Joe King (Flickr)

Peas

Keep peas in the **fridge** in an **airtight container**.

Fresh peas (snap or shell) can be blanched and **frozen** in an **airtight container**. Freeze them on a cookie sheet first before transferring to a container to avoid sticking.



© Dave Gunn (Flickr)

Peppers: red, green, or hot

Only wash peppers right before eating them.

Partially-eaten peppers can be stored in the **fridge** with the seeds and stems attached to extend shelf life.

Peppers can be **frozen**, either raw or blanched, to be used later for cooking.



© Paul Goyette (Flickr)

Persimmon

Store at room temperature until ripe (Fuyu will still be firm, Hachiya will be mushy) and then store in the **fridge**.



© Koshy Koshy (Flickr)

To hasten the ripening process, place in a paper bag with a few apples. Don't stack them, as they get very fragile when ripe.

Pomegranates

You can store pomegranates **on a cool counter**, but they will keep longer in an open container in the **fridge**.



© sarawestermark (Flickr)

Potatoes

Store potatoes in a **cool, dark place** somewhere slightly warmer than the fridge. A box in a dark corner of the pantry or a paper bag work well.

Moisture and exposure to light causes spoilage.

Onions cause potatoes to sprout. They're still good to eat—just cut off the sprouts and eyes.

While apples cause most produce to spoil, apples can help keep potatoes from sprouting, so you may want to store them together in a cool place for long-term storage.

Cooked and mashed potatoes can be **frozen** to eat later.



© Brian Hoffman (Flickr)

Rhubarb

Wrap in a damp towel and place in an open container in the **fridge**.



Rice

Store dry rice in an **airtight container**.

Cooked rice can be **frozen** in an **airtight container**.



Root vegetables

(Includes celery root/celeriac, parsnips, radishes, rutabagas, turnips)

Remove any greens and store separately (see Greens, cooking).

Greens from some root vegetables such as turnips and radishes are edible and delicious when cooked.

Store in a **cool, dark**, humid root cellar or in an **airtight container** with a damp towel in the **fridge**.



© Farmanac (Flickr)

Squash

(Includes acorn, butternut, pumpkins, and all thick-skinned squash that are often categorized as "winter squash")

Store in a **cool, dark, well ventilated place**. Many growers say winter squashes get sweeter if they're stored for a week or so before eaten.



Stone fruit

(Includes peaches, plums, nectarines, and apricots. Cherries are exception: see "Cherries")

Store in a cool place out of the sun until ripe.

Once ripe, store open in the **fridge**.

Stone fruit can be **frozen**—peeled or unpeeled. Cut and freeze on a cookie sheet then put in an **airtight container**.



© Thomas Hawk (Flickr)

Sweet potatoes

Store in a **cool, dark, well ventilated place**. Never refrigerate—sweet potatoes don't like the cold.



Tomatoes

Tomatoes can be **frozen** either raw or cooked.

Tomatoes should be stored **on the counter** unless very ripe, at which point transfer them to the **fridge**.

Tomatoes give off ethylene gas that causes other produce to deteriorate, so store them separately.

To hasten ripeness, place them in a paper bag with an apple.



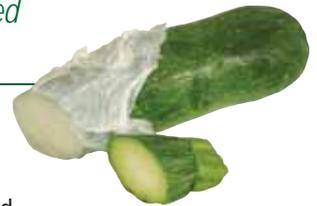
© Dwight Sipler (Flickr)

Zucchini

(Includes patty-pan, yellow squash, and all thin skinned squash varieties often categorized as "summer squash")

Wrap whole or cut ends in a damp cloth and keep in the **fridge**.

Zucchini can be **frozen** either blanched or raw. Store in an **airtight container**.



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