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Storing Fresh Produce Well

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Summer and fall are great times of year to get fresh produce at bargain prices. But to take advantage of good prices and not waste food, it may be important to know how to store foods well to keep them at their freshest for the longest time.

Temperature of a refrigerator, basement, cold storage room or cave can be tested with a refrigerator thermometer. Since temperature can vary at different locations within an available space, use a thermometer in each area to test its temperature. Remember that when a door to a refrigerator or cold room is held open, warmer air from the room can warm the storage space within. Close the thermometer in the space, let it equilibrate, and then check it quickly to find the best options. Humidity can be checked with a hygrometer or humidity meter in a similar way.

When considering storage conditions, look at temperature and humidity combinations. Different types of produce do best in different conditions. Some crops, like root crops and cole crops (such as broccoli, cabbage, kohlrabi and cauliflower) do best in cold, moist storage. This means 32-40 degrees Fahrenheit, and 90-95% relative humidity. Other produce that store well in these conditions include greens, legumes like peas and lima beans, and other vegetables including green onions, sweet corn and asparagus.

For vine crops like cantaloupe, cucumbers and watermelon, cool, moist storage is better suited to keep them longer. This means 45-50°F and 80-90% humidity. Eggplant, green beans and sweet peppers also do well under these conditions. Other crops, like onions and hot peppers, prefer cool, dry storage, or 32-55°F and only 50-60% relative humidity. Pumpkins and winter squash, on the other hand do best in the warm, dry conditions of 55-60°F and 60-70% humidity. And lastly, warm, moist storage of 55-60°F and 80-85% humidity is best suited for sweet potatoes and tomatoes.

Under the proper conditions produce's shelf life can be prolonged to a few extra days or weeks, or even a few months for some items. The MU Extension publication, [Vegetable Harvest and Storage, G6226](#), explains these conditions and describes just how and when to harvest specific types of produce and how to store each type for the maximum time.

To get this guide, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office. It can also be found on our web site at <http://extension.missouri.edu> by searching for Vegetable Harvest and Storage.