



Selecting Fresh Vegetables

Choose fresh vegetables that are in season to help insure you get the best tasting and highest quality vegetables. When buying fresh vegetables, buy only what you will use within a few days. Wash vegetables thoroughly with clean, cool, running water just before they are to be prepared or eaten. The following chart will help you select the best fresh vegetables.

See “Calendar of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables” on page 48-49 of the NEP *Food Preparation Manual* for a list of when fruits and vegetables are in season.

	Buy	Avoid
Asparagus	Look for closed, compact tips; spears should be smooth and round with a rich green color.	Avoid tips that are open and spread out. Avoid spears that are ribbed, have moldy or decayed tips, or are covered with sand, as it is hard to remove.
Broccoli	Stalks should be firm and the tops should have tight clusters of small flower buds. Look for a solid dark green color.	Do not buy broccoli with open or enlarged buds and/or a yellowish-green color, as this shows it is old.
Carrots	Carrots should be firm, smooth, well formed and have a good orange color. Tops of the carrots should be fresh with a good green color.	Do not select carrots that have large green areas at the top that must be removed before eating. Avoid carrots that are wilted.
Cauliflower	The curd (the part of the vegetable that is eaten) should be creamy white, solid and compact.	Do not buy if the curd is starting to spread, as this shows it is old. Avoid cauliflower that is wilted, speckled with brown (caused by decay), or moldy. Look for injury from insects.
Celery	Look for firm ribs without any spots. Leaves should be crisp and green.	Avoid celery with yellow leaves and stalks.
Cucumbers	Look for firm cucumbers with good green color. They should be well developed, but not too large.	Avoid very large cucumbers with a dull or yellow color. Shriveled or withered cucumbers are likely to be tough and bitter.

Know how. Know now.

Green Beans	Beans should have a fresh, bright look with a good color. They should be firm and crisp.	Do not buy wilted beans or those with signs of decay. Long, thick, and tough beans are old.
Lettuce/Cabbage	Pick heads that feel heavy for their size or bunches with crisp tender leaves and rich color.	Avoid heads with leaves that show signs of yellowing or browning.
Peppers, Bell	Look for those that are firm, heavy for their size, and a deep shiny color.	Avoid wilted peppers or those with thin walls. Check for soft spots because this is a sign of decay.
Potatoes	Select potatoes that are smooth, firm and free from any green color. Do not store in the refrigerator.	Avoid green potatoes and those with large cuts, bruises or decay. Do not buy potatoes that have sprouted or those that are wilted.
Sweet Corn	Look for bright green husks. Ears should be well filled with even rows of plump kernels. When pricked, kernels should give a squirt of juice.	Avoid corn with underdeveloped kernels, wilted or dried husks, brown kernels or depressed areas on the kernels.
Sweet Potatoes	Look for firm sweet potatoes with a bright orange skin.	Avoid those with worm holes, cuts or decay. Even if you cut away decayed parts, a bad taste may still be present.
Summer Squash (Zucchini & Yellow Crookneck)	Look for tender, yet firm and well developed squash. Tender squash has a glossy looking skin.	Do not pick summer squash that looks dull, or has a hard, tough surface, as they are stale or old. Avoid those with discolored or pitted areas.
Winter Squash	They should have a hard, tough skin and should be heavy for their size.	Avoid those with cuts, sunken or moldy spots. If the skin is tender, the squash is too young and will not have the best taste or quality.
Tomatoes	Tomatoes should be smooth, ripe and free from defects. Ripe tomatoes will be slightly soft and have a rich red color. Place unripe tomatoes in a warm area to help them ripen.	Do not select tomatoes that are bruised, have cracks or are very soft. Tomatoes that have soft spots, sunken areas or mold are usually decayed and should not be picked.

Source: How to Buy Fresh Vegetables, Home and Garden Bulletin 258, www.ams.usda.gov/howtobuy/fveg.htm