

Apricots

Unsulphured apricots are naturally darker in color than sulphured fruit.

2 ounces contains:

calories	protein	fat	carbohydrates	fiber	potassium	iron
151	2 g	0 g	35 g	3 g	737 mg	2.2 mg

Avocados



With their incomparably smooth texture and opulent buttery flavor, it may be surprising to find out how nutrient dense avocados truly are. An excellent source of potassium, folic acid and vitamin C, avocados have very little sugar or starch yet contain more protein than any other fruit. Their high oil content is 70% monounsaturated, much like olive oil, which means it's good for you.

Avocados also contain significant quantities of the antioxidant lutein, which research shows to be beneficial for eye health. You can feel good about adding this nutritional powerhouse to your diet.

Though often used like a vegetable, avocados are a tree fruit, native to Central America, and cultivated since at least 3500 BCE. The Spanish praised them when they arrived in the early 16th century and distributed the plant to other tropical locations worldwide, but avocados were generally underappreciated in the United States until the 1870's.

Avocados are now an important crop in California, Florida, Hawaii and parts of the Gulf Coast as well as countries such as Israel, Australia, the Canary Islands and along the north coast of Africa. This nutritious fruit is best known as the central ingredient in guacamole, a dish that dates to the Aztecs a millennium ago. In addition to mashed avocados, the original version (called *ahuaca-mulli*) contained tomatoes, onions and coriander. Wrap it all up in a freshly made corn tortilla and you have a hint of ancient Tenochtitlan before it was destroyed and rebuilt as Mexico City. Guacamole can be as simple as mashed avocado with a bit of salt and lime juice, or more elaborate and flavorful.

The Aztecs didn't limit the use of avocados to guacamole and neither should you. Try serving them over broiled chicken breasts, in chilled soups, with seafood or in salads.

The flesh of avocados can be diced along with tomatoes, cucumbers or other vegetables for a delicious vegetable salsa. Try a halved avocado with the pit removed as a bowl-like container for tuna or shrimp salad. Combine avocado with pineapple juice and cream cheese in a blender for a terrifically creamy dressing for fruit salad.

Today's descendants of the Aztecs sprinkle halved avocados with salt and eat them with tortillas and a cup of coffee for a light meal. Further south, Brazilians treat the avocado as more fruit than vegetable, mashing them into ice cream or blending them into shakes. Asians eat them with sugar or combined with other fruits such as dates, bananas, grapefruit and pineapples.

Blackberries



The exquisite blackberry is a bramble fruit, which means they grow on bushes with thorns. Bramble relatives include raspberries and roses. Their historical minor medicinal roles include use for gout by the ancient Greeks as well as medieval physicians and folk healers using them for digestive complaints. Like most darkly colored fruits and vegetables, blackberries are rich in antioxidants, including vitamins C and E as well as ellagic acid.

Blackberries lend themselves well to numerous recipes for desserts, jams and drinks and are available fresh, frozen and canned. The prime season for fresh berries runs from May through September, peaking in June and July.

Shopping

Fresh blackberries are more difficult to find in season than other berries because shipping accelerates loss of quality. Locally grown berries sold by Whole Foods Market or farmer's markets are your best bet. Look for berries that are firm, dry and of uniform purplish-black color.

Storage

Blackberries, like all berries, are extremely perishable so be prepared to use them within 24 hours of purchase. As soon as you get them to your kitchen, empty the carton and discard any crushed or

moldy berries. Consume the soft, overripe berries immediately and return the rest of the berries to the carton or place them in a single layer on a shallow plate or pan, then cover with paper towels and plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to two days. Blackberries freeze well. Simply place them in a shallow pan or plate on a sheet of waxed paper so they're not touching and freeze solidly, then transfer them to a freezer quality bag or container.

Tips

Serve fresh blackberries drizzled with honey or tossed in a salad. Cooked desserts and jams incorporate fresh or frozen blackberries equally well. There is no need to thaw frozen berries when cooking them in pies, cobblers and the like.

Blood Oranges

The dark orange rind of this Italian favorite contains red flesh that's a colorful and lovely complement to cheese platters and fruit salads. The deep color means it has more antioxidants than other oranges. The flavor is sweet with hints of raspberry. Available November through early spring. See entries for Common Sweet Oranges, Navel Oranges and Seville Oranges.

Clementines

Clementines are a darkly colored variety of mandarin, or tangerine, popular in the American Southwest, from Texas to California. Small and thin skinned, they are easy to peel, have few or no seeds and separate easily into segments. Perfect for snacking out of hand or as an addition to green or fruit salads. Clementines originated in Algeria around 1900 CE and were brought to the United States shortly thereafter. The season runs from November through January. See entries for Mandarins and Satsumas.

Common Sweet Oranges

Valencia is the most important and ubiquitous variety of many in this category. Primarily used for juice, sweet oranges have a mild flavor that is often augmented during the commercial juicing process with peel oils. They can be eaten out of hand but are more difficult to peel and segment than navel oranges. The season for Valencias runs from March through June with other varieties filling out the calendar year. See entries for Blood Orange, Navel Orange and Seville Orange.

Cranberries

Also native to North America, cranberries are cousins to the blueberry — though much more tart and all gussied up in bright red skins. They also proved valuable to Native Americans in both a dietary and medical sense, used in pemmican and, due to its astringency, as a poultice for wounds. The health value of cranberries has grown due to a 1994 research study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association that showed the effectiveness of cranberries (in the form of juice) in reducing the incidence of urinary tract infections.

Their wild habitat of acidic bog and low ground was exploited in their cultivation. Commercial growers now use diked areas similar to those used by rice farmers that are flooded during harvest. The low

bushes are shaken, the fallen berries float on the water and are skimmed with nets. Cranberries are commonly consumed as juice or sauce, their extreme tartness mitigated by the addition of sugars or other fruits. The peak season runs from October through December, lending their festive color and sharp flavor to holiday celebrations.

Shopping

Firmness is the best indicator of quality in cranberries while depth of color — a lustrous, deep scarlet-red — is a measure of their antioxidant content. Fresh berries, particularly organic ones, are sold hand-packed in pint containers in our produce department or at farmer's markets. Conventional berries are typically available in 12 oz. plastic bags and are readily available just before the winter holidays.

Storage

Fresh cranberries can be stored in the refrigerator for up to three or four months. They may be kept in the freezer for up to a year. Once thawed however, they will be soft and must be used immediately.

Tips

Rinse thoroughly before using. If using frozen berries in recipes that do not require heat, allow to thaw completely and then drain. For cooking recipes, there is no need to thaw but you may wish to extend cooking time slightly to accommodate their frozen state.

The natural tartness of cranberries can be used as a substitute for vinegar or lemon in tossed salads. To mitigate their tartness, combine with other fruits such as pears, apples or oranges.

Dates

Dates are an ancient and exotic pleasure. Their browned, caramel-like flavor — succulent and mildly sweet when fresh, chewy and intensely sweet when dried — is unique in the kingdom of fruit. They come from a palm tree, *Phoenix dactylifera*, that has been essential to human survival in the Middle East and North Africa for millennia, with every part of the tree being used. This area remains the primary source for dates, though now they are also cultivated in drier parts of Asia and the tropical Americas and the deserts of southern California and Arizona.

Date varieties number more than 1,500, though only two or three are found regularly in stores in the United States. Of these, Medjool and Deglet Noor are the most common, available year round in dried form. Bari and Honey are two other varieties that are available sporadically in season. Fresh dates are marketed in greater variety but their availability is severely limited outside of southern California. The fresh date season runs from late summer through December.

Dried or fresh, dates are highly prized in desserts such as cakes, cookies, puddings and sweet breads and are delicious eaten out of hand — dates rolled in shredded coconut are an especially divine treat — or added to breakfast cereal. But they also have a savory side that is often neglected. In North Africa, they are routinely used in stews or casseroles featuring chicken or lamb, steamed with couscous, or combined with citrus fruits and nuts in salads. Chopped dates are an excellent substitute for raisins.

Nutritionally, dates score quite well, with significant amounts of fiber, antioxidants and potassium. Dried dates typically contain about 70% more calories than fresh dates due to increased sugar content. That sweetness makes them a high carbohydrate food, but calories can vary widely depending on variety and size. According to the USDA, Deglet Noor dates contain about 20 calories each while Medjools weigh in at more than 60.

What to Look For

Fresh dates should be plump and glossy. Dried dates are commonly sold out of bulk bins and may have wrinkles. Check for blemishes and mold, which is usually found on the stem end. Some dried varieties exhibit a dusting of sugar crystals on the surface that can be mistaken for mold. Sugar on or just under the skin does not indicate inferior quality. Surface sugar can be easily removed by steaming the dates for about 10 minutes or covering with a damp cloth and baking for 15 minutes in a 300°F oven.

Storage and Preparation

You can keep fresh dates covered in the refrigerator for 3 or 4 weeks. Dried dates should be kept in an airtight container either at room temperature (a cool, dark place is best) or in the refrigerator and will last for several months.

To remove the pits from dates, cut a slit in the side and pry out the seed. Cutting or chopping is easily done with a pair of kitchen shears.

Gooseberries

The gooseberry is an odd, usually spiny berry that enjoys huge popularity in Great Britain, where annual competitions are held for the largest and tastiest fruit. Enthusiasm for its acidic taste is also strong across northern Europe and in some localities in the northern U.S. and southern Canada. Related to currants, gooseberries range from a pale translucent green to yellow to purplish red and are similar to small grapes in size, though some European varieties are smaller. Sauces made from them complement game meats well — their name derives from the fact that they were commonly used in sauces for roast goose. The English love them in pies, puddings and a soufflé-like dessert called Gooseberry Fool, which consists of gooseberries cooked in sugar, then sieved and folded into whipped cream. They also pair well with rhubarb and raspberries.

The gooseberry season runs from June through August, peaking in July. Availability in the U.S. and Canada is spotty since they are essentially a local product and not cultivated commercially on a large scale.

Shopping

Early season gooseberries are typically the green "cooking" variety, which are smaller and firmer than late season varieties. Late season berries are larger and softer with a color range from yellow to red, are sweeter and can be eaten raw. Look for berries that are clean, plump and feel like grapes.

Storage

Early season green berries will keep unwashed in the refrigerator for up to a week and a half. They also freeze well. Later season varieties are more fragile and should be kept refrigerated for no more than two or three days.

Tips

Peel off any husk that may be present, rinse and pat dry. Trim top and tail with kitchen scissors. Gooseberries can vary greatly in acidity and sharpness of flavor, so be prepared to adjust the amount of sweeteners called for in recipes.

Grapefruits

Grapefruit (*Citrus paradisi*) is the most recent offspring of the Citrus family - a family prone to hybridization - appearing in the West Indies in the 18th century.

A cross between the sweet orange and pomelo, grapefruit is a large, round citrus fruit with a somewhat bitter flavor that is an acquired taste for some.

Its assertive flavor recommends it as a dessert fruit rather than one for cooking. Difficult to peel, it is often halved and eaten with a spoon. Globally, about half the grapefruit crop is used for juice. A milder flavored pink variety appeared in 1913. Grapefruit is available year round but supply peaks in January.

Key Limes

Also called West Indian or Mexican lime (*Citrus aurantifolia*), this small, yellow-green fruit is the original or true lime and the most acidic of all citrus fruits.

It is the dominant variety everywhere except North America. It can be squeezed over green salads, in ice water, atop seafood soups and fish dishes, with rum drinks of all kinds and, of course, in Key lime pie.

In the Middle East and Asia, dried limes are used extensively in stews, giving them a pleasantly tangy flavor. Available year round with supply peaking June through August. See entry for Persian lime.

Kumquats

This smallest fruit of the citrus family boasts an edible rind and a juicy, slightly tart flesh. A wonderful addition to salads (use whole). Also used in preserves and jams, or candied. Native to China, though now grown in the United States and Japan. Available throughout the winter months.

Lemons

Lemons are perhaps the most versatile citrus fruit and certainly the most important for cooking, having been used as an accompaniment for fish and seafood for centuries; as a souring agent; a crucial ingredient in sweet dishes such as meringue and chiffon pies, mousses and soufflés; a source of both flavor and pectin in jams and jellies; a delicate substitute for vinegar in salad dressings; a flavor enhancer for tropical fruits like guava and papaya and, of course, lemonade.

Lemons are available year round with the U.S. fifth in production behind India, Argentina, Spain and Iran.

Mandarins

Also known as tangerines in the U.S., mandarins (*Citrus reticulata*) are smaller, flatter and have less acid than oranges. Their delicate flavor is lost in cooking so mandarins are usually eaten fresh. They are typically more darkly colored than oranges, with looser skins that peel and segment easily. Available November through spring. See entries for Clementines and Satsumas.

Mango



Background

Reference to mangos as "the food of the gods" can be found in Hindu writings dating as far back as 4000 B.C. The mango originated in Southeast Asia, but quickly spread with the Europeans in the 16th century. Today, it is grown throughout the equatorial belt, including the Caribbean.

Appearance

The mango is a large oval smooth-skinned fruit with a juicy aromatic pulp and a large hairy seed.

Taste/Uses

With its fragrant scent and sweet flavor, mangos are great for a snack or for making delicious juice, preserves or flavoring for ice cream and sorbet.

How to eat a mango

First, cut crosswise around either side of the pit. Next, pull the two halves apart and then use a knife to cut vertical and horizontal lines, creating bite size cubes. Finally, remove the flesh of the two pit less portions, turning the unharmed skins inside out. Eat the cubes right off of the skin or peel them off and use them in a favorite mango recipe.

Minneolas

A variety of tangelo.

Tangelos

Tangelos are a cross between mandarins and pomelos or mandarins and grapefruit. The best known

varieties in the U.S. are Minneola, with a rich, sharp flavor and distinctive pronounced knob on the stem end, and Orlando, a pale orange fruit with a mild flavor. Its juice is well suited to salad dressings and sauces for meats. Available January through March. See entry for Ugli fruit.

Navel Oranges

Easily peeled and seedless, navel oranges (a member of the *Citrus sinensis* species) are the best choice for eating fresh. They are distinguished from other oranges by a navel-like depression on the blossom end, beneath which is a miniature set of segments. Juice squeezed from navel oranges becomes very bitter within minutes due to a compound called limonin.

Navel oranges originated in China and are now cultivated in subtropical areas worldwide. The season runs from late October through April in the U.S., with the best quality oranges available in mid-season, December to February. See entries for Blood Oranges, Common Sweet Oranges and Seville (bitter) oranges.

Papaya

Background

Papaya fruit (also know as "pawpaw" or "tree melon") has been used for thousands of years in South America as a meat tenderizer. From its origins within present day Mexico, it has spread throughout the tropics. Today, it is a true Caribbean favorite.

Appearance

An orange-fleshed, melon-like fruit, some papaya weigh up to ten pounds, but most are about the size of a mango. The papaya will ripen at room temperature, so you can buy papaya when firm and eat them when soft and yellow in color.

Taste/Uses

Papaya is delightfully sweet, and often enjoyed in ice creams, salads, preserves, juices or simply alone, with a wedge of lime (often part of a Caribbean breakfast). Unripe papaya is best for cooking.

Passion Fruit

Background

The alluring name actually originates from Spanish priests who "discovered" the flower of this plant in the early 1600's. It was, however, the Incas and Aztecs of South America who first cultivated and regularly harvested passion fruit.

Though it prefers subtropical climates, such as the Caribbean, it has been adapted to the mild climate of coastal California, and is currently grown in areas around the Monterey and San Francisco Bay.

Appearance

This oval shaped, lime-size fruit has bright orange, highly perfumed, bracingly tart flesh. The leathery skin can be red, brown, purple or green.

Taste/Uses

The flesh is riddled with tiny crunchy black seeds which are edible, although not to everyone's liking. For this reason, the pulp is usually strained and enjoyed in juice form. Passion fruit is too tart to eat straight, but it is excellent in sauces and cocktails.

Peaches

2 ounces contains:

calories	protein	fat	carbohydrates	fiber	potassium	iron
155	2 g	0.3 g	36 g	3.7 g	524 mg	1.7 mg

Pears

2 ounces contains:

calories	protein	fat	carbohydrates	fiber	potassium	iron
157	1.2 g	0.3 g	37 g	7.6 g	335 mg	1.4 mg

Persian Limes

Persian limes (*Citrus latifolia*), called Bears limes in California, are the dominant variety in North America and the only one cultivated here. Typically used to flavor beverages of all sorts, they are twice the size of Key limes and seedless. Available year round in produce departments.

Pineapple



Background

The ever-popular pineapple is a favorite tropical fruit year round. While most of the world's pineapple is grown in Asia for canning purposes, the fruit is also grown on many of the Caribbean islands.

Appearance

With a sweet flavor and unique pinecone shape and texture (the name is no accident), pineapple is often a favorite ingredient in many tropical desserts and drinks.

Taste/Uses

Though many types are tart in flavor, the more popular varieties have been bred for sweetness. Pineapple makes a wonderful addition to yogurt, fruit salads, juices, baked sweets, preserves and many other recipes.

How to pick a ripe pineapple

Look for a soft, orange complexion. Pull on the top leaves. They should fall off easily with a sharp tug. Smell the bottom of the fruit. Its sweet fragrance should be easily detectable.

Plantain



Background

This veritable favorite of Caribbean cuisine was actually unknown to the region until European explorers introduced it in the late sixteenth century.

Appearance

Similar to a common banana, plantains are green when unripe, turning yellow, and then black when fully ripened.

Taste/Uses

Hard and starchy, plantains must be cooked before eaten, whether ripe or unripe. Their flavor is often favorably compared to that of potatoes but ripe plantains can be nicely sweet.

Raspberries

Ripe, red raspberries are a most welcome sight on the late spring table. A bramble fruit like blackberries, raspberries are more delicate and elegant in both structure and taste, having a hollow core and a sharper, brighter flavor. Raspberry canes have been cultivated at least since the middle of the 16th century, perhaps as early as the 4th century, and are thought to be indigenous to Asia Minor, probably arriving in North America via the prehistoric land bridge across the Bering Sea. Despite their fragility, raspberries pack a powerful nutritional punch, filled with antioxidants and dietary fiber. Add their heady fragrance and contradictory sweet-but-tart flavor and you have a versatile natural food that works for everything from cheesecake to marinades.

Raspberries are most abundant May through October, with their peak season varying depending on climate and local varieties. The vast majority of raspberries in the U.S. come from California. Imported raspberries may be available at other times of the year, sometimes extending the season as late as February.

Shopping

Look for berries that are plump, firm, dry and deeply colored. Most berries are sold in cellophane-wrapped containers, so make sure the berries have not been wrapped too tightly and that there are no telltale stains or leakage that may indicate damage or spoilage. Avoid berries that exhibit mold, moisture or loss of color.

Storage

Raspberries are fragile and highly perishable and should be consumed or frozen within two days of purchase. When you get them home, inspect and discard any damaged or moldy berries. Place the remaining unwashed berries back in the container or on a plate, cover with paper towels and plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to two days. Do not keep at room temperature because they can spoil in a matter of hours.

Raspberries freeze very well. Place them in a single layer in a shallow pan on a sheet of waxed paper and freeze solidly (at least two hours), then transfer to an appropriate freezer-quality container.

Tips

Raspberries are a special treat on cereal or mixed with plain yogurt and honey on pancakes or waffles. For a flavor twist on eating out of hand, try sprinkling them with a little balsamic vinegar. Toss a few berries into a celebratory glass of champagne or white wine for a sensuous flavor boost.

Satsumas

Satsumas are a type of mandarin orange developed in Japan in the 16th century. They are less acid than other mandarins. Commonly used for canning, they are seedless, thin-skinned and easily peeled and segmented. Available December to April. See entries for Clementines and Mandarins.

Seville (bitter) Oranges

Not popular in North America, Seville oranges are mostly grown in Spain (hence the name) and used by the British to make marmalade. The dried rind is used in some Mediterranean cultures as an aromatic for savory stews and the like. See entries for Blood Orange, Common Sweet Orange and Navel Orange.

Strawberries

Strawberries symbolize the wealth and delight of summer fruit and, of all the major berries, are the most popular and plentiful. Possibly cultivated as early as the Roman era, they came into their own in the 18th century when accidental crossbreeding (two species, *Fragaria virginiana* and *Fragaria chiloensis*, indigenous to North and South America respectively, happily met in Europe) ultimately resulted in the large, sweet berries so familiar to us today.

In addition to being the undisputed king of berries in terms of economics and sheer numbers, strawberries are second only to blueberries in antioxidant content and they have more vitamin C than any other berry.

The Strawberry season runs from April through July. This is when the California harvest is at its peak, though imports make them available year round.

Shopping

Choose berries that are firm, dry, well-shaped and have a uniform deep red color with attached green caps. Medium-sized berries often have better flavor than extremely large ones. Check cellophane-wrapped containers for stains or dampness, which could indicate damage, and make sure the berries are not wrapped too tightly. Look under the top layer of berries in open containers to check for mold.

Storage

Because strawberries are highly perishable, be prepared to consume or freeze them soon after purchase. Check them as soon as you get home and set aside any overripe or slightly damaged berries for an immediate snack. Discard any moldy or crushed berries. Return the remaining berries to the container or to a plate and gently cover in paper towels and plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to two days.

Strawberries may also be frozen and kept for up to ten months. Simply place them in a single layer on a cookie sheet and freeze solidly (at least two hours), then transfer to an appropriate freezer container. The caps can be removed or left in place, depending on how the berries will be used when thawed.

Tips

The uses for strawberries are limited only by your imagination. They're great in summer salads, mixed with blueberries in parfaits, tossed into breakfast shakes, dipped in chocolate, or sliced with pears and drizzled with honey.

Table Grapes



Imagine a nicely chilled, deliciously succulent grape fresh off the stem, with many more grapes hanging there, waiting to be picked and savored. When you picture it that way, it's easy to see how grapes became so popular and are now cultivated throughout the world; they are, in fact, one of our oldest cultivated crops.

Starting near the Black Sea in prehistory and spreading to southern Europe and beyond, domesticated grapes evolved from a convenient forage fruit to a diverse crop that provided juice, raisins, wine and wine vinegar. Eventually, wild species in North America, Asia and southern Africa were brought into the prolific fold, but few rival the varieties created over millennia by the devoted husbandry of European farmers.

Today, most grapes end up as wine, raisins and juice, in that order. About 15% to 20% are reserved for fresh eating. "Thompson seedless," a robust green-gold grape from Turkey known elsewhere in the world as Sultana, dominates the field as the grape of choice for fresh use. This variety also dominates the raisin industry and even appears in some lesser-quality jug and sparkling wines. Concord is another well known grape variety. Dark purple in color with an intense berry flavor that is somewhat tart, Concords are a popular dessert fruit as well as being important for juice, jellies and sweet wines.

Here are some lesser-known varieties that may appear in your local produce department:

- Beauty Seedless – firm blue-black skin and tender flesh that is mildly sweet with a hint of spice.
- Black Corinth – widely known as champagne grapes, they are very small, intensely sweet and seedless grapes that are often used to good visual effect as an edible garnish.
- Emperor – a large, seeded red grape with mild sweet flavor.
- Kyoho – one of the most popular varieties in Japan, where it is traditionally served peeled. This Concord-like seeded variety is very large and sweet.
- Muscadine (Scupperong) – a sweet, seeded grape native to the southeast coast of the United States. Color can range from pale straw to purple-red.
- Muscat – perhaps the oldest cultivated grape variety, Muscat is an important wine and raisin grape, but its sweet perfume and flavor also make it a favorite for eating out of hand. Colors can range from near white to near black.

- Red Flame – a very popular seedless variety with a sweet/tart flavor, firm skin and tender flesh. Small, and perfect for salads.
- Red Globe – a European favorite. Large, with large seeds and a sweet, mild flavor.
- Ribier – a very large, seeded, blue-black grape with an excellent, slightly tart flavor.

Because they're convenient and easier to eat, seedless varieties (now 80% of the American fresh market) are preferred, although seeded varieties such as Concord are said to have a more robust flavor. Don't like spitting seeds? Simply cut the grape in half and scoop out the seeds with the point of a knife.

Recent research attributes health benefits to grapes, particularly the darkly colored varieties. Dark blue-black or red grapes contain the phytochemical resveratrol, purported to fight inflammatory conditions and promote health. And studies show that regular, moderate consumption of red wine enhances heart health. Whether a result of the alcohol content or the antioxidant-rich flavonoid (resveratrol) content is up for debate, but it is certain that red wine helps maintain normal cholesterol levels and healthy circulation. In addition to their high antioxidant levels, grapes are a low sodium, low calorie food with good amounts of fiber.

What To Look For

The domestic fresh grape season begins in May and runs through December, with imported varieties filling in the rest of the year. The ripening process stops after harvest, so what you see is what you get. Select fruit that is firm, ripe, clean and not too tightly packed on the stem, which itself should be firm, crisp and green. The greener the stem, the fresher the grapes. The grapes should be uniformly shaped and colored and have a somewhat chalky bloom, another indication of freshness. Blue grapes should be quite dark, nearly black, with no green or pale tinges. Red grapes should be deeply colored with no milky areas. Green grapes should have a somewhat translucent yellow-amber cast. Avoid grapes that are wrinkled, dully colored or have limp stalks.

Storage

Ripe grapes may be kept in a perforated or open plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 4 or 5 days. Freezing alters the flavor slightly but makes for a great snack on hot summer days. To freeze, simply wash and pat dry, then arrange individual grapes in a single layer on a cookie sheet or plate and freeze thoroughly (at least two hours). When frozen, transfer to a suitable freezer container.

Tips

Always wash grapes thoroughly before eating them, preferably in water with a bit of lemon juice or vinegar added - this counters the natural sugars in grapes and gives them a piquant flavor. (The acid also helps to preserve grapes after they've been washed.) If you're not going to consume the entire bunch, remove small clusters with scissors instead of pulling off individual grapes. This prevents the stem from drying out, keeping the remaining grapes fresher.

Some recipes say to peel grapes, but this is rarely necessary. Grape skins contain most of the nutrients and flavor and should be used whenever possible.