



Vegetables and their Benefits

From Select Stores Health Food Store, Dalkey.

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VEGETABLES

Artichokes



Selecting

Look for small, round artichokes that are heavy for their size. A fresh artichoke should squeak when squeezed. Leaves should be tightly packed and slightly tender, not dried out. Peak artichoke season is March through May.

Storing

Store in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week.

Using

Cut off the top third of the artichoke; trim the prickly tips off the leaves with kitchen scissors; then cut off excess stem (leaving up to an inch intact). Boil artichokes in a large pot of water for 30-40 minutes (depending on size) until the outer leaves can easily be pulled off. Many cooks add a garlic clove, bay leaf, salt or lemon slices to the water. Artichoke leaves are delicious dipped in garlic butter and other sauces. After eating/removing the leaves you will reach the “heart” of the artichoke (located at the base of the artichoke where the stem attaches), which is the most tender part; to eat it, scrape off the fibrous fuzz with a spoon, then cut the remaining meaty heart into pieces. Eat artichoke hearts with a dipping sauce or add them to pasta dishes or pizzas. The cooked stem of the artichoke can also be eaten, though it is the most bitter part.

Nutrition Information

Artichokes are a good source of folate, magnesium, fiber and vitamin C.

Fast Fact

Food you eat directly after eating artichokes can taste sweet because of a substance in them called cynarin. This makes successful wine pairings difficult, so it's better to serve artichokes with water or beer.

Asparagus



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Selecting

Look for firm, straight, rounded stalks with small, crisp tips. Avoid woody stalks. The girth of the stalk is not important; both thin and thick asparagus can be tender. Fresh asparagus should not have a strong odour. Choose bunches with stalks that are uniform in size to ensure uniform cooking. Available in green, white and purple varieties; white asparagus is less sweet. Asparagus is a spring vegetable with a short seasonal peak, usually best in late April through July.

Storing

Eat fresh asparagus as soon as possible. Keep it in the refrigerator for three to four days maximum.

Using

Trim the woody ends of asparagus stalks before cooking. Very thick or tough stalks can be peeled, though peeling is not necessary (some cooks peel them for aesthetic effect). Asparagus can be boiled, steamed, grilled or roasted. Lightly steamed asparagus is wonderful with just a bit of high quality olive oil and fresh lemon juice.

Nutrition Information

Asparagus is a good source of vitamin C and also supplies iron, folate, beta-carotene and glutathione (an antioxidant).

Fast Fact

Asparagus has historically been used medicinally to relieve indigestion and as a sedative.

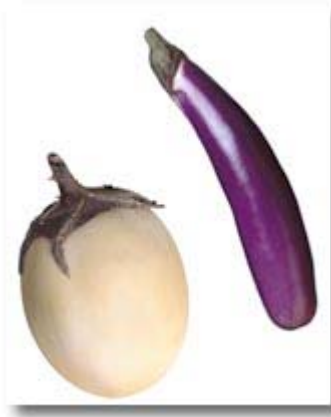
Aubergine



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Selecting

Purple, amethyst, green or white, striped or solid, big or small, slender or plump—aubergines come in an astonishing array of colours, shapes and sizes. Look for an aubergine that is heavy for its size, which means it's been grown in a stress-free environment with adequate heat and moisture. Aubergine should be glossy, not dull, with taut skins and no soft spots, cuts or bruises. The skin should rebound when pressed gently with your thumb. Choose small to medium-sized fruit for fewer seeds and firmer texture. The fruit should have a green cap and a portion of stem. Aubergine is most flavourful in late summer or fall, when crops are allowed to mature in open fields.

Storing

Aubergine does not store well at all and should be used within 36 hours of purchase. Do not refrigerate it because the flesh will deteriorate at temperatures below 50°F. Keep it in a cool place away from direct sunlight and heat.

Using

A 1-pound aubergine yields approximately 3 to 4 cups diced. Some cooks peel aubergine and some don't. It depends on the recipe and particular aubergine. White varieties and some large aubergines with thicker skins need to be peeled or, even when cooked, the skin will be difficult to cut and chew. Whether peeling or not, rinse eggplant in running water and dry it with a towel; then trim off the green cap and stem and cut the aubergine as the recipe directs. To preserve texture and reduce aubergine's tendency to absorb oil during cooking, sprinkle the sliced or cubed flesh with salt and allow it to sit in a colander for 30 minutes or so. After salting, you may wish to rinse and pat dry to reduce the salt content. Contrary to popular belief, salting does not reduce the bitterness of aubergine; rather it shrivels the outer cell walls and pulls moisture from the interior, blocking absorption of oil and helping maintain firmness. Once cut aubergine will discolour quickly (if you're not salting it, sprinkle it with lemon juice to minimize discoloration).



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Nutrition Information

Aubergine is high in fibre, folate, potassium, manganese, vitamins C and K, thiamin, niacin, vitamin B6, pantothenic acid, magnesium, phosphorous and copper.

Fast Fact

Botanically a fruit but treated as a vegetable, aubergine is a member of the nightshade family, which also includes tomatoes, potatoes and chilli peppers.

Beets



Selecting

Most beets are a deep purple-red colour, but a few varieties are pale orange, gold or white. Baby beets (golf ball size or smaller) cook faster, but taste the same as larger (baseball size) ones, which can be cut to speed up cooking. Choose beets that are smooth and round with deep colour. Avoid bruises, soft spots or moist spots. If purchased with the leaves on, the leaves should look fresh with deep colour. Beets sold loose with the tops cut off should be firm and heavy for their size with no wrinkles or sprouts. Beets are most abundant from June through November.

Storing

If purchased with the leaves intact, cut the leaves off about an inch above the beet, then refrigerate the beets and greens separately in plastic bags. The greens will keep up to one week and the beets will keep for two to three weeks.

Using

The mild, earthy flavour of beets pairs well with vinegar, citrus, cheese and nuts. They can also be used to make borscht (beet soup) or pickled. Beet Greens(leaves) are delicious sautéed or in salads. Dark-coloured beets will change the colours of other foods when combined, and will stain clothing, cutting boards and other surfaces so protect them accordingly.



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Nutrition Information

Beet roots are a source of fibre, folate, potassium, iron, magnesium, manganese and vitamin C. Beet greens are a source of protein, folate, fiber, vitamins A, C, E and K, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin B6, potassium, manganese and other nutrients.

Bell Peppers



Selecting

Look for peppers that are deeply coloured and free of wrinkles, soft spots or other indications of age or decay. Shape or size is not usually an indicator of quality. Most bell peppers have three or four bulbous lobes, but some varieties are tapered with no conspicuous lobes. Sweet banana peppers are an exception with their elongated shape. All bell peppers are green when young, changing to red and orange as they mature. All are edible, regardless of colour, though more mature peppers are sweeter. They are available year round but are most abundant during the summer months.

Storing

Raw bell peppers freeze very well. Simply wash them, core them, then cut them into pieces; freeze in a single layer and transfer to an appropriate freezer container, eliminating as much air as possible to minimize freezer burn. Use frozen vegetables within eight months.

Using

To remove the stem and core from a bell pepper, cut a circle around the stem or gently tear the stem off the top (most of the seeds will come with it), then shake out the remaining seeds from inside and remove as much of the white ribs as possible (using your fingers or a knife). If you wish to leave a bell pepper whole for stuffing, cut a circle around the stem, leaving it attached with a slight inward lip or rim around the edge, then cut the rest of the pepper in half lengthwise and proceed to remove the seeds and ribs.

Nutrition Information

Bell peppers are an excellent source of vitamins C, A and K, a good source of vitamin B6 and are low in calories.



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Broccoli, Cauliflower



Selecting



Broccoli and cauliflower both belong to the brassica (cabbage) family and are so closely related that during the earliest stages of growth, the two plants are identical. The two main types of broccoli are sprouting broccoli, which is spring harvested and has purple, green or white heads; and Calabrese, which is summer harvested and has green or purple heads. Other variants and genetic crosses include broccoflower, which is somewhat sweeter and milder than broccoli; and Romanesco, which has a unique pyramidal shape with spiral florets. Broccoli rabe is not a type of broccoli, though it is a member of the brassica family. For all varieties, look for stalks that are slender and snap-crisp. Broccoli floret buds should be tight and darkly coloured (yellowing is a sign of age). Cauliflower should have compact curds that are clean, uniformly white or creamy white, with no spots or bruising, and firm to the touch.

Storage

Keep broccoli and cauliflower in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator in an open or perforated plastic bag. Do not keep beyond four days, and do not wash until you are ready to prepare them. Cauliflower curds should be kept stem side up to prevent moisture from gathering on the florets. Pre-cut florets should be used within a day of purchase.



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Using

All varieties can be eaten raw. Cut away the main stem and separate florets before washing. Broccoli stems can be eaten; simply slice them thinly and cook until tender. Cauliflower curds should be separated; they can be cooked whole but this requires longer cooking times, which results in the loss of nutrients. Rapid cooking is best to prevent nutrient loss and to preserve texture and colour. Avoid aluminium pots, which can enhance the cabbage-like cooking odour created by these vegetables.

Nutrition Information

Broccoli is an excellent source of vitamins C, K and A as well as a good source of folate, B6 and manganese. Cauliflower is an excellent source of vitamin C.

Fast Fact

Cauliflower is white because it lacks chlorophyll since its large leaves prevent sunlight from reaching the vegetable while it grows.

Brussels Sprouts



Selecting

Choose firm, small, compact sprouts with a good green colour and stem ends that are clean and white. When possible, select sprouts of uniform size for uniform cooking. Avoid those with wilted or yellowed leaves or that feel spongy. Sooty smudges or small holes in the leaves may be an indication of worms or plant lice. Old Brussels sprouts acquire a strong cabbage odour. Brussels sprouts are most abundant in autumn through early spring.

Storage

Do not wash or trim Brussels sprouts until you are ready to use them. Sprouts purchased on the stem can be kept on the stem in the refrigerator if you have room. If not, remove them with a sharp knife and store loose sprouts in a perforated plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator (discard the stem). Fresh sprouts will keep for up to five days.



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Using

To wash Brussels sprouts, place them in a bowl of lukewarm water for about 10 minutes (this eliminates any insects hiding in the leaves), then rinse thoroughly. Trim any bruised or yellowed leaves if necessary as well as the stem end, being careful not to trim away too much so the outer leaves don't fall off during cooking. (The outer leaves contain the most nutrients.) Cut an X in the base of each sprout so the interior cooks as quickly as the outer leaves. Regardless of cooking method, test for doneness by inserting the tip of a knife into the stem end, which should be barely tender. Overcooking enhances an unappealing cabbage-like odour. Brussels sprouts can be boiled, steamed or braised.

Nutrition Information

Brussels sprouts provide vitamins C and A, folic acid, potassium, fibre and protein.

Cabbage



Selecting

Look for cabbage that is heavy for its size with leaves that are unblemished and have a bright, fresh look. Dried out or discoloured outer leaves, or leaves that separate from the stem, could indicate age or disease. Heads that weigh 2 pounds or less are usually a better choice for tenderness and flavor. Buy whole cabbages whenever possible. Pre-cut or pre-shredded cabbage has a greatly diminished vitamin content. Chinese or Asian cabbage (bok choy, napa cabbage and tatsoi) is a different species altogether, although they are all part of the brassica family. Peak season for most cabbages runs from November through April.

Storing

Fresh whole cabbage will keep in the refrigerator for one to six weeks depending on type and variety. Hard green, white or red cabbages will keep the longest while the looser Savoy and Chinese varieties



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should be used more quickly. Keep the outer leaves and do not wash before storing since moisture will hasten decay. Cut cabbage should be used within two days (wrap partial heads securely in plastic wrap). Frozen cabbage will keep up to one year. To freeze, cut or shred coarsely and blanch in boiling water for 2 minutes. Drain and allow it to cool, then place it in an airtight container and freeze. Frozen cabbage should only be used in cooking applications.

Using

Cabbage complements meat dishes, especially smoked or salted meats, as well as root vegetables, and it is delicious in stir-fries. It pairs well with red wine and herbs and spices. Onions, apples, horseradish and sour cream make great flavour combinations when combined with cabbage. Cabbage is also used to make sauerkraut. Red cabbage may bleed colour onto other ingredients when used in salads; adding lemon juice, vinegar or wine can reduce this effect. To reduce odours when cooking cabbage, cook it immediately after cutting or shredding (those actions increase the formation of the pungent flavour compounds) and cook cabbage only as long as necessary.

Nutrition Information

Cabbage provides fiber, vitamins A, C and K, folate, potassium, manganese, B6, thiamin, calcium, iron and magnesium.

Fast Fact

The infamous odour of cooked cabbage comes from sulphur compounds, which are actually a good thing—they contribute to the vegetable's antioxidant content.

Carrots



Selecting

Carrots should be bright, firm and smooth skinned. Avoid carrots that feel rubbery or have cracks or small rootlets. Carrots vary in size depending on the variety, and any type can be harvested early as a more tender baby carrot, though some types are bred specifically to have smaller roots. The "baby" carrots typically found in supermarkets are larger carrots (usually varieties bred for consistent colour and sweeter taste) that have been machine cut to achieve their tiny size and uniform shape.



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Storing

Carrots will keep for weeks in the refrigerator. Store them in plastic bags, or cut carrots can also be stored immersed in water in a plastic container (some experts recommend changing the water every few days). Do not store them near apples, bananas or melons as the ethylene gas those fruits produce will increase the bitter tasting compounds in the carrots called isocoumarins.

Using

Carrots should be thoroughly washed and scrubbed. It is not necessary to peel them, although many cooks prefer to do so because it will change their surface texture and also will remove the outer layer that may contain more pesticide residue than the inside of the carrot.

Nutrition Information

Carrots are loaded with vitamin A. Look for red or purple coloured varieties, which are packed with anthocyanins.

Chili Peppers



Selecting

Look for peppers that are deeply coloured and free of wrinkles, soft spots or other indications of age or decay. Peppers should be chosen based on their flavour and heat. The spiciness level of a pepper is expressed in Scoville units, a measure of the capsaicin content in the pepper, which is perceived as "heat" by the human palate. The heat range of individual peppers can vary dramatically because it is affected by both the variety and growing conditions.

Popular Pepper Varieties

Variety	Characteristics	Scoville Units	Recommended Use
Anaheim	mild heat, medium size, green or red	100-1,000	chili relleno, seared, broiled, grilled or smoked



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Poblano	slight heat, large, dark green	1,000-2,000	chili relleno, roasted, grilled, dried to make Ancho chili powder
Green Chilis	medium heat long, tapered	2,000-5,000	sandwiches, chili, queso, roasted, grilled
Jalapeños	hot, small, dark green	5,000 to 6,000	chili, tacos, nachos, pickling, most common variety used to make chipotle peppers
Serranos	very hot, very small, red when ripe	15,000-20,000	used in Mexican and Asian cuisines, substitute for jalapeños in recipes for a kick
Cayenne	very hot, long, narrow, red	40,000-50,000	most often found in powdered form on the spice aisle
Habañeros	extremely hot, orange or red pods	200,000 or higher	found in many commercial hot sauces, add to recipes with caution

The term “chipotle” has become extremely popular when describing various salsas and sauces made from chili peppers. Chipotles are not a variety of peppers, but rather they are smoked jalapeño peppers. Originally used as a preservation technique by the Aztecs, smoking provides a rich earthy flavour that complements robust foods like chilli very well. Chipotles are available both dried and in powder form, as well as canned in adobo sauce.

Storing

Most fresh peppers will keep, unwashed, in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator for about a week.

Using

The seeds and membranes in chili peppers contain most of the “heat” in the form of capsaicin, a compound that causes the familiar mouth-burning sensation. Removing these parts will reduce a chili’s heat. To remove seeds and membranes from a large pepper (like poblanos), cut a circle around the stem or gently tear the stem off the top (most of the seeds will come with it), then shake out the remaining seeds from inside and remove as much of the white ribs as possible (using your fingers or a knife). If you wish to leave large peppers whole for stuffing, cut a circle around the stem, leaving it attached with a slight inward lip or rim around the edge, then cut the rest of the pepper in half lengthwise and proceed to remove the seeds and ribs. For small peppers, slice the pepper lengthwise down the centre in order to access the ribs, then use a knife to gently carve or scrape out all seeds and membranes. Use care when handling peppers that are spicy with your hands—the oils that cause a burning sensation may linger for hours even after you wash your hands (an unpleasant surprise if you rub your eyes or remove contact lenses). To prevent this problem, wear gloves or use utensils instead of your fingers to handle the pepper.



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Nutrition Information

Chili peppers are very high in vitamins C and A. They are also known for clearing sinuses when eaten (especially the very hot ones) and may help to improve circulation (certain types are even found as ingredients in orally administered natural remedies). Capsaicin is also known for relieving inflammation caused by arthritis when applied topically in a cream.

Fast Fact

The capsaicin found inside hot chili peppers is the ingredient that makes the pepper spray used by law enforcement so effective.

Corn



Selecting

Sweet corn can be yellow, white, or a combination of yellow and white called bi-colour. Kernel colour has no effect on sweetness. Look for ears with husks that are fresh, tight and green, not yellowed or dry. Peel back part of the husk to see if the kernels are bright, plump and milky. Overly large or indented kernels at the tip are a sign of over-maturity. The silk should be moist, soft and light gold, not brown and brittle.

Storing

Refrigerate corn until ready to prepare it. Some varieties of sweet corn can lose half their sugar content in one day if kept at room temperature. Leave the husks on to retain moisture. If the ears are already husked, place them in a perforated plastic bag. If you have more corn on hand than you can use in a day or two, parboil it for just a minute or two and refrigerate it up to three days. To complete the process, just drop them into boiling water for one minute. Or, cut the kernels from the cob and then refrigerate.

Using

Unless you are grilling or roasting corn in the husk, strip off the husk and snap off the stems (or leave the stems on to use as handles). Pull off the silk, using a dry vegetable brush to remove strands between the kernels. To remove corn from the cob, hold the cob vertically, resting the tip on the work surface, and slide a sharp knife down the length of the cob. For cream-style corn, slit each row of kernels with a sharp knife and then run the back of the knife down the length of the cob to force out the pulp and juice, leaving the skins of the kernels on the cob.



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Nutrition Information

Corn is a source of fibre, magnesium, phosphorous, thiamin and vitamin C.

Fast Fact

Corn is America's number one field crop for volume and production.

Cucumbers



Selecting

Select firm cucumbers without bruises that are heavy for their size and rounded at the tips. Avoid shrivelled tips or soft spots. Overall size can vary with the type, but smaller, slender cucumbers typically have fewer seeds and more flavour. They should have a rich green colour, not yellow, and be cool to the touch. Slicers, or salad cucumbers, are the most common type. Pickling varieties are smaller and squatter than their slicing cousins, with thicker, bumpier skins, and are usually harder to find. Greenhouse cucumbers, also known as English or "burpless" cucumbers, are seedless and milder in flavour than field-grown varieties, and can be substituted for slicers in any recipe.

Storing

Keep unwashed cucumbers in the refrigerator crisper. Un-waxed cucumbers should be checked daily for spoilage, while waxed ones keep for about a week. Wrap cut cucumbers tightly in plastic wrap and use within a day or two.

Using

If a cucumber is not waxed, you can leave the skin on. All waxed cucumbers should be peeled; slice off the ends first to make the job easier. Removing the seeds (there is no harm in eating them) is a matter of personal preference. Cucumbers add texture and crunch to sandwiches and salads and can be used to create delicious summer soups like gazpacho. They are also a cool complement to fish and poultry dishes.



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Nutrition Information

Cucumbers are 95% water. They have minimal nutritive value, but also minimal calories.

Fast Fact

On a hot summer day, the inside of a garden cucumber can be 20 degrees cooler than air temperature.

Fennel



Selecting

Florence fennel (also known as finocchio), the type commonly found fresh in produce departments, is typically referred to in recipes as a “fennel bulb” because its overlapping stalks grow into a fist-sized swelling at its root. Look for Florence fennel bulbs that are firm and clean. Bulbs are usually available with stalks and feathery leaves intact, so make sure the stalks are close together, not spread out, and that there are no flowers on the stalk. Fennel bulbs are sometimes sold with the stalks already cut off, a possible indication that they are not fresh; avoid them if the cuts are dried out and white or if there are splits or brown spots. There are two other types of fennel, bitter fennel and sweet fennel, which are entirely edible but rarely sold as fresh produce; instead their stalks or seeds are used to flavour other foods. Sweet fennel plants are the source of the anise-flavoured seeds found in the spice aisle. Bitter fennel is similar to celery seed in culinary applications; the stalks are often chopped and used in stews and pickles.

Storing

Store unwashed bulbs of Florence fennel in the refrigerator crisper drawer for up to four days. Keep fennel seed tightly sealed in a dark, cool place for up to one year.

Using

When preparing fresh Florence fennel, cut off the stalks where they emerge from the bulb (they can be used in stews and soups and the leaves can be used as an herb, like dillweed); then slice or dice the bulb as desired, discarding the dense core. Add Florence fennel to potato salads, greens salads, dressings or dips. It is also commonly sautéed, fried or steamed as an ingredient in savoury recipes.



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Sweet fennel seeds are sold in the spice aisle and can be used in many recipes. Sweet fennel is also used in herbal formulas and aromatherapy, and in some cultures it is customary to chew the seeds after meals as a breath freshener.

Nutrition Information

Florence fennel is a source of niacin, calcium, phosphorous, copper, fibre, vitamin C, folate, potassium and manganese.

Fresh Beans (Edamame, Fava, Green Beans, Lima)



Selecting

There are two main types of beans that are eaten fresh: “edible pods,” including green, snap, yellow wax and scarlet runner; and immature “shell beans,” including fava, soybeans, cranberry beans and limas (also known as butter beans).

Look for loose edible-pod beans so you can pick out beans of equal size for uniform cooking. Choose beans that are free of rust spots and scars and that have vivid colour and velvety feel. They should also be straight and slender with a firm texture and should snap crisply when broken. Avoid beans that are stiff or have seeds that are visible through the pod. The seasonal peak for these varieties is in summer and early fall.

Fresh shell beans should be firm and bulge through a tightly closed pod. If already shelled, the beans should be plump and tight-skinned. Soybean pods have two to four beans per pod and should be plump and well filled with no signs of browning. Lima beans, soybeans and cranberry beans are available from mid-summer through early fall; fava beans from late spring through early summer.

Storing

Keep all types of fresh beans in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator crisper. Edible-pod beans will stay fresh for three to five days, shell beans for two or three days.



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Using

For edible-pod beans, snap or trim both ends. Leave them whole for cooking or cut crosswise or diagonally into 1- or 2-inch lengths. For shell beans, remove them from their pods by splitting the pod open and push the beans out with your thumb. Rinse before cooking. Opening the pod may be easier if you shave the seam of the curved side with a paring knife or vegetable peeler. Large fava beans not only need to be shelled, but their tough skins must be peeled either before or after cooking. To peel the raw beans, split the skin with your thumbnail or a sharp paring knife. The skins of cooked favas will slip off easily.

Nutrition Information

Fresh beans are not as nutritionally dense as dried beans, but they do offer some vitamin C, folate and iron. Beans that are deep green in colour also have beta-carotene.

Garlic



Selecting

Look for bulbs that are plump and compact with several layers of dry, papery husk. A heavy, firm bulb indicates that the garlic will be fresh and flavourful, whereas a bulb that's too light is probably too old. Avoid damp or soft bulbs and bulbs that have begun to sprout, as well as any that have dark, powdery patches under the skin, evidence of a common mould that will eventually decay the flesh. Spring garlic (also called garlic greens) is a younger, delicately flavoured type that can be chopped and added raw to soups or salads. Elephant garlic is not true garlic at all, but is actually a type of leek; it does not provide the same health benefits as regular garlic and has much milder flavour.

Storing

Garlic will keep for a few weeks to a few months, depending on its variety, freshness when purchased, and storage conditions. Garlic may be kept in the refrigerator for up to a week, but refrigeration is not advised for long-term storage. Do not store uncooked garlic in the freezer; freezing destroys its texture and adds an acrid flavour. Never store raw garlic in oil at room temperature; this can lead to botulism, a potentially lethal form of food poisoning. Garlic has the potential to sprout, which diminishes its pungency and flavour. To prevent this, keep garlic in a loosely covered container and put it in a cool, dark place away from sunlight and heat.



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Using

To easily peel garlic, separate the cloves from the bulb and place them on a cutting board. Lay the flat side of a broad knife on top of one clove at a time. Tap the knife with a closed fist. A fairly gentle impact is all that's required to split the peels without smashing the clove. Be careful not to burn garlic when sautéing; it will turn bitter. Roasting whole garlic bulbs will mellow its flavour and transform cloves into a spreadable consistency. If you're hoping to receive the touted health benefits from cooked garlic, you must chop or crush the cloves and then wait a few minutes for the allicin compound to form before applying heat; also keep cooking time to a minimum. If you need to use a garlic bulb that has begun to sprout, trim off the bitter-tasting sprouts first, then proceed as usual. If you plant sprouted cloves and let them continue sprouting to a height of about six inches, you can use the sprouts like chives in salads and soups or as a garnish.

Nutrition Information

Garlic contains more than 100 sulphur compounds, which may help promote healthy arteries and cholesterol levels. Allicin, the best known, is formed when cloves are crushed, chopped or chewed, releasing its characteristic scent and flavour.

Fast Fact

Americans consume more than three pounds of garlic per person annually.

Leafy Greens

Spinach



Kale



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Selecting

Greens vary widely in flavour from sweet to bitter to earthy, and many are pungent, peppery and sharp. Regardless of variety, always look for crisp leaves with vibrant colour. Yellowing is a sign of age and indicates that the greens may have an off flavour. Young, leafy greens generally have small, tender leaves and a mild flavour. Many mature plants have tougher leaves and stronger flavours. Choose mild-flavoured greens such as collards, chard, bok choy or spinach when you want their flavour to blend well with other ingredients in your dish. For a medium sharpness, choose kale. For stronger, assertive flavours, select mustard, arugula, mizuna or turnip greens. To create a balanced dish, combine mild and strong flavoured greens together. Collards, kale, turnip greens and mustard greens are at their best from October through early spring. Swiss chard and beet greens are best from the spring through the fall. Dandelion greens are available and best in the spring and summer.

Popular Leafy Greens

Variety	Characteristics	Recommended Use
Arugula	peppery, delicate texture	raw in salads or sandwiches, versatile for cooking
Beet Greens	mild, slightly sweet, very tender	steam, braise or sauté, eat raw in salads
Bok Choy	sweet, mild, stays crisp when cooked	stir-fries, salads or soups
Broccoli Rabe	tender, chewy, robust flavor	sauté or braise, typical in Italian fare
Collards	mild, sweet, cooks to tender texture	steam, braise or sauté, shrinks less than other greens when cooked
Dandelion Greens	pungent, spicy, bitter	eat small leaves raw, braise or sauté longer leaves
Endive (Chicory)	tender, bitter, high in fibre	eat raw in salads, cook briefly for milder flavour



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Escarole	coarse, mildly bitter	eat raw in salads, steam, braise or add to soups
Kale	mildly peppery, tender	boil, steam or sauté, tough stems and ribs must be removed
Mizuna	tender, spicy, exotic flavour	serve raw or slightly wilted, mix with other greens in salads
Mustard Greens	subtle hot mustard flavour	steam, braise or sauté, tough stems and ribs must be removed
Spinach	soft, sweet, rich flavour	multi-purpose, eat raw in salads and sandwiches, sauté, braise, add to soups, quiches or pasta
Swiss Chard (Red, Green, Rainbow)	tender, sweet, velvety texture	multi-purpose, wilt, sauté, braise, add to soups, casseroles or pasta, red chard may “dye” other foods
Turnip Greens	sharp, bitter	boil until silky for traditional Southern style

Storing

Most greens can be stored in the refrigerator for several days. Wrap collards or kale in a damp paper towel and place in an open plastic bag in the crisper drawer (or coldest section) of your refrigerator. Store chard, escarole, chicory, broccoli rabe and mustard greens in a perforated plastic bag. Tender, delicate leaves (such as beet greens) wilt very quickly, so use them as soon as possible or purchase them on the day you plan to prepare them.

Using

Greens with similar texture can be used interchangeably in recipes, though they will impart slightly different flavours. One pound of fresh, untrimmed greens will typically serve two to three people. While this may look like a lot when raw, a significant portion of the plant (stems and ribs) will be discarded and most greens shrink considerably when cooked. To prepare greens for washing, cut off the stems and discard any bruised leaves. For greens with tough stems, such as collards, mustard and kale, cut off the stem backbone, which can be quite tough. Chard, bok choy, turnip and beet greens have tender stems that can be eaten along with the leaves. Wash the greens and edible stems in a sink full of water to remove dirt and sand. Bunches of greens that are especially sandy may require several soakings. Curly and grooves on the leaves can hide bits of sand, so be thorough even if the greens look clean. Drain the greens in a colander and chop or slice them according to recipe directions.

Nutrition Information

Greens provide a wide array of nutrients including fibre, beta-carotene, calcium, iron, folic acid and chlorophyll (the green pigment found in plant cells). Many varieties of leafy greens, especially



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members of the cruciferous (cabbage) family such as collards, kale and bok choy are also rich sources of vitamin C.

Leeks



Selecting

Choose leeks that are firm and slender with clean white necks no more than 2 or 2-1/2 inches in diameter. The necks should be straight all the way to the root end (if the bottom is beginning to bulge, it was picked too late and will probably be tough and woody). Tops should be fresh and green, not wilted or torn. If the stalk itself is limp, pass it by. Prime leek season runs from September through April.

Storing

Leeks will keep well in the refrigerator for up to one week. Wrap them loosely in plastic wrap to prevent their aroma from being absorbed by other foods and to help retain moisture. Cooked leeks should be refrigerated in a sealed plastic bag or covered container and used within one or two days. Do not freeze leeks.

Using

Leeks should be cleaned thoroughly because soil can collect between the leaves and work its way down the stem. To prepare leeks for any recipe, first cut off the roots at the base and the dark top portions of the leaves (the leaves are edible but have a stronger, less pleasant flavour than the white stalk). Then slice the stalk as directed. Use care not to overcook leeks or they will become soft and slimy. Leeks are related to the onion but are milder and sweeter with a crisp texture when cooked, making them versatile as an addition to soups and stews or as a side dish. They are the prime ingredient in the classic French cold soup, vichyssoise.

Nutrition Information

Raw leeks are a source of fibre, vitamin B6, iron and magnesium, vitamins A, C and K, folate and manganese.



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Fast Fact

Leeks are more nutritious than onions, containing slightly more vitamins and minerals.

Mushrooms



Selecting

In general, withered, slimy, pitted, or bruised mushrooms should be avoided. An appealing earthy fragrance is a good sign, but any ammonia-like odour indicates spoilage. Unless they are actually spoiled, slightly older mushrooms are not necessarily a bad choice (the flavour intensifies), but depending on your recipe, you may prefer fresher, more tender ones. For cooking whole, choose smaller mushrooms. For slicing or chopping, medium-sized varieties work best. For stuffing, choose those with large caps. Though they may be used together or interchangeably in some recipes, each type of mushroom imparts slightly different flavours and has its ideal uses:

Button, Cremini and Portobello mushrooms are very closely related. Cremini looks and tastes much like a button, but is a bit larger with a brown cap. When growth is unchecked, it becomes a portobello with more complex flavour and texture.

Chanterelle has a beautiful curved trumpet or vase shaped with color varying from bright orange to apricot gold. Wonderful simply sautéed with olive oil, the flavour ranges from apricot-like to fruity earthiness.

Enoki mushrooms are tiny and dainty with a creamy white cap on a long slender stem. Their delicate nature, mild, sweet taste, and slightly crunchy texture make them best for using raw in salads, floating on soups, or tossing into a stir-fry just before serving.

Morels are tan to dark brown with conical spongy caps that hide a hollow interior that must be rinsed thoroughly before cooking. Their intense, earthy flavour complements meat dishes well; however, fresh morels sautéed in butter are heavenly on their own.

Oyster mushrooms have a unique fan shape with prominent ridged gills. Their color ranges from off-white to pink, yellow or grey-brown. They are delicate in flavour. Sauté briefly or use in mild dishes; they are complemented by butter, onion, seafood and gentle herbs.



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Shiitake mushrooms (also called Black Forest or Chinese Black) are chocolate brown with a whimsical, umbrella-shaped cap and fibrous, woody stems. Their strong flavour makes them a good all-purpose mushroom and their firm texture can stand up to long cooking times. Use in everything from a quick stir-fry to a casserole, but be sure to remove their tough, inedible stems first.

Porcini mushrooms (also known as Cepas or King Boletes) range from two to eight inches wide, growing from umbrella-shaped to nearly flat with age. Yellow-brown to dark red-brown in colour, they are smooth, moist and firm. With a robust, meaty flavour and sturdy texture, they can be used in any recipe requiring a definite mushroom flavour, whether cooked briefly or at length. The liquid from soaking dried porcinis is valuable for soup and sauce making.

Truffles are elusive, stemless fungi with an irregular, round shape. They are one to three inches in diameter with a rough surface, blackish-brown in colour and very firm in texture. Growing completely underground, truffles are very difficult to cultivate. Harvesting in the wild requires the assistance of trained truffle-hunting pigs or dogs during a short season. The expense of this operation and the fact that demand far exceeds supply shows up in the cost; however, a small truffle shaving imparts big flavour. Often grated finely over egg dishes, truffles are also used in other mild dishes (such as rice or creamy pasta) where their pungent, unique flavour shines. This intense flavour fades quickly with time, yet moves into the medium in which they are stored, so they are often used to create luscious truffle-scented oil.

Storing

Refrigerate un-cleaned, fresh mushrooms in a paper bag or their original container. They remain freshest when neither too dry, nor too damp, so never store in airtight plastic, and place on a regular shelf (rather than in a high-humidity produce drawer) in your fridge. Depending on the variety and the humidity level, they should keep well, but use soon after purchase so they remain firm and blemish free and so they do not absorb odours or flavours from other foods in the refrigerator.

Using

To clean mushrooms, simply brush off any dirt with a soft brush or a damp paper towel. If you must wash them, rinse only very briefly under running water and dry quickly on a paper towel. Mushrooms absorb water easily and should never be soaked for cleaning. Cut off and discard any portion of the stem holding a lot of soil. If your recipe calls for just caps, save the clean, unused stems for making stock.

Nutrition Information

Most mushrooms are good sources of B vitamins, potassium and selenium (an antioxidant). All mushrooms are a good source of fibre. Touted for their immune-boosting properties in Asian medicine, certain mushrooms are now being studied by Western doctors.

Okra



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Selecting

Look for small, young pods that are no more than 3 inches long (these are the most tender). Choose pods that are clean, fresh and green and that snap crisply when broken in half. Avoid pods that look dull and dry. Okra becomes fibrous and tough when over-mature.

Storing

Don't wash okra until just before you cook it; moisture will cause the pods to become slimy. Store untrimmed, uncut okra in a paper or plastic bag in the refrigerator crisper for no longer than three or four days.

Using

When washing okra, if the pods are especially fuzzy, rub them in a kitchen towel or with a vegetable brush to remove some of the fibres. If cooking whole pods, trim a tiny slice from the stem end and tip without piercing the internal capsule; prepared this way, the juices won't be released and the okra won't become gummy. When cutting slices, trim the stem end more deeply. To minimize okra's thickening juices, keep cooking time at a minimum; for instance, add it to recipes during only the last ten minutes. When okra is used in a soup, stew or casserole that requires long cooking, it should be cut up and allowed to produce its juices. Do not cook okra in a cast iron or aluminium pot, or it will darken. The discoloration is harmless, but unappetizing.

Nutrition Information

Okra is a good source of vitamin C, lutein, magnesium, and potassium. It's also high in fibre.

Fast Fact

Okra originated in Africa, and the word "gumbo" is a derivative of a West African word that means okra.

Onions, Shallots

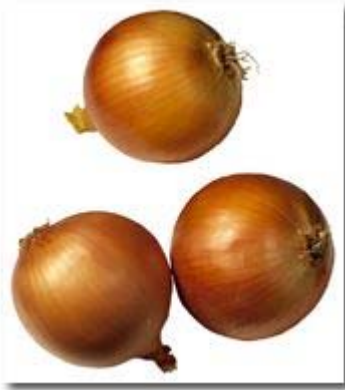
Onions



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Shallots



Selecting

Most members of the onion family are divided into two categories, sweet onions and storage onions, although some specialized onion varieties are somewhere in between.

Sweet onions are seasonal, harvested in spring and early summer, cured briefly, then rushed to market. Their flavour is sweet and mild. Their shelf life is shorter than storage onions. These onions are palatable when raw because they have high sugar content and low sulphur content. There are many varieties of sweet onions grown throughout the world, including AmeriSweet, Maui, OSO Sweets, SpringSweets, 1015 SuperSweets, Sweet Imperial, Vidalia and Walla Walla.

Storage onions are most plentiful from August through April. They are more pungent than sweet onions and have lower water and sugar content, which makes them the ideal choice for savoury dishes that require long cooking times or intense flavours. These attributes, together with multiple layers of husk and generally thinner necks, allow them to be stored for long periods, as their name implies. Storage onions come in yellow, red and white. Yellow can be used in virtually any recipe and they have the longest shelf life. White onions are also versatile and are traditionally used in Mexican cuisine. Red onions are often preferred for salads and sandwiches, and they caramelize well. Bermuda onions (may be yellow or white) and Spanish onions are milder than most other storage onions.



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Cippolini (pronounced chip-ah-LEE-nee) onions occupy the middle ground between sweet onions and storage onions. They are a perfect choice for those who shy away from strong onions but still want a hint of pungency.

Boiler or pearl onions are simply immature onions. They are useful for kebabs, stews or pickling because of their size. Peeling them can be a chore.

Scallions and green onions are very immature onions with much milder flavour. Their green tops can be substituted for chives. To the average cook and for most purposes, scallions and green onions are identical, but there is a technical difference. True scallions are completely bulbless and younger, whereas green onions are harvested just after a bulb has begun to form.

Spring onions are young, delicately flavoured onions with a mild flavour. They are a welcome addition to stir fries and salads.

Shallots are the sophisticates of the onion family, long associated with French haute cuisine. They have a delicate flavour that is suggestive of both sweet onions and garlic. Quite pungent when raw, shallots truly taste best when lightly sautéed or used in sauces.

Regardless of variety, choose onions that are dry and solid all over with no soft spots or sprouts. The skin should be dry and shiny and tight around the neck. Due to higher moisture content, sweet onions will not be as hard as storage onions. Large onions are best for slicing in salads and sandwiches and are a better choice for peeling or chopping. Small to medium onions are best for recipes such as stews where they are used whole or cut into wedges. Colour is a poor guide to flavour and texture because an onion's pungency or water content is highly dependent on the soil and climate in which it was grown.

Storing

Storage onions should be kept in an open space that's cool and dry, away from bright light, which can make them bitter. Do not store them under the sink or anywhere that may be damp. Due to higher levels of sugar and moisture content, sweet onions require more care than storage onions; they can keep up to four or five weeks if stored properly. Rough handling and bruising can shorten their storage life dramatically. If you want to refrigerate them, store them in a single layer on a paper towel in the crisper; at room temperature, hang them in a single leg cut from a pair of pantyhose (tie a knot in the pantyhose in between each onion) or place them on an elevated rack making sure they do not touch one another. Cut onions should be wrapped tightly in plastic and refrigerated for no more than two or three days. Cooked onions can be refrigerated for up to five days in tightly covered glass or plastic containers. Do not store cooked onions in metal containers because they will become discoloured.

Using

To remove onion odour from your hands, try sprinkling salt on your palms and then rubbing them together under running water. Another method is to wash your hands and, while still wet, rub them on stainless steel, such as a cooking pot or steel sink. Onions make people cry because of the reaction of enzymes to the air as they are sliced or chopped. Here are a few tips that can reduce the tears:

- Chill the onions. The enzymes in onions don't react to the air as quickly when they're cold.
- Use a sharp knife, lessening the amount of enzymes exposed to air.



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- Chop or slice onions on a cutting board under your stove's exhaust fan, or set up a small portable fan to blow the fumes away.
- Renowned chef Julia Child found that wearing swimming goggles was the most effective. Contact lenses also help.
- Burning a candle near the cutting board works for some people.

Nutrition Information

Onions are a rich source of phytochemicals that may promote healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels. They are also a source of vitamin C, fibre, vitamin B6, folate and manganese. Green onions and scallions are more nutritious than other types; their green tops have higher amounts of vitamin C, folate, calcium and beta-carotene than regular onions.

Fast Fact

To naturally eliminate onion breath, try eating an apple or chewing on fresh parsley, citrus peel or roasted coffee beans.

Parsnips



Selecting

Look for well-shaped, small, firm parsnips. Large, older parsnips require more peeling and have a woody core.

Storing

Like carrots, parsnips will keep for weeks in the refrigerator in a plastic bag.



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Using

Parsnips should be scrubbed rather than peeled. Take care not to overcook them or they will become mushy. Parsnips have a mild celery-like fragrance and a sweet, nutty flavour. They are one of the most versatile for cooking and add complexity to stews, soups and mashed potatoes. They also make excellent "chips."

Nutrition Information

Unlike carrots, parsnips contain no beta-carotene, but they do provide fibre, folate, magnesium, potassium, Vitamins C and E, calcium, iron, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and B6.

Peas



Selecting

There are three main types of peas that are at their seasonal peak in spring: Sugar snap peas have edible pods and are filled with plump, sweet peas; these should be fat and very green; avoid those that are pale, flabby or damp. Snow peas have flat, edible pods and they are harvested young before the peas inside fully form; fresh ones will be small, translucent, straight-sided and have very small peas inside. Garden peas (English peas) are what most people know as standard peas in a pod. They are used for canning and freezing; the pods are inedible. When buying fresh garden peas, look for rounded pods that are usually slightly curved in shape with a smooth texture and vibrant green colour. Garden peas actually have more nutrients and more calories than snow peas or sugar snap peas, but they require more work to prepare because they have to be shelled.

Storage

Snow peas and sugar snap peas should be used as soon as possible after purchase. They both lose flavour and structure when stored. In top condition, you may be able to store snow peas in the refrigerator for a few days in a loosely closed paper bag or perforated plastic bag. Garden peas are sweet and succulent for three to four days after they are picked, but turn mealy and starchy very quickly after harvesting.



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Using

Sugar snap peas and snow peas can be eaten raw, but cooking improves their flavour. Both require very little cooking (steam snow peas for just three minutes and sugar snaps for about four minutes). Overcooking ruins their character. Shelled garden peas can be eaten raw or gently cooked and added to recipes. Sugar snap peas, with their edible pods are great for snacking; garden peas, when shelled, are wonderful steamed or in soups, salads and grain dishes; and snow peas are an essential ingredient in stir-fries.

Nutrition Information

A member of the legume family, peas are an excellent source of folate, vitamins A and C, and a good source of zinc.

Potatoes



Selecting

Look for potatoes that are firm, smooth and the colour they should be for their variety. Avoid potatoes that feel soft or have a green tinge or wrinkly skin.

Popular Potato Varieties

Variety	Characteristics	Recommended Use
Purple Viking	smooth, creamy texture	mashing
Red Bliss and Red Dakota	dry, flaky, sweet texture	roasting, potato salad
Russet or Idaho	starchy, dry texture	baking, mashing
Russian Banana	tender, buttery texture	roasting
White Rose	waxy, thin-skinned	potato salads



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Yellow Fingerling	moist, flavourful potato	roasting, particularly with other juicy vegetables
Yellow Finn	buttery, creamy flavour	boiling, baking
Yukon Gold	tender, buttery texture	versatile: roasting, baking or mashing

Storing

Potatoes will keep well in a cool dry place for a number of months. Exposure to direct sunlight may turn them green and make them bitter. Green potatoes and potato sprouts are high in the alkaloid solanine, which can be toxic if eaten in large quantities. Green potatoes should not be eaten and sprouts on any potatoes should be removed before cooking.

Nutrition Information

Potatoes provide an energizing supply of carbohydrates, as well as important vitamins and minerals, including potassium, niacin, vitamins B6 and C, and manganese. Eat them with the skins to boost fiber intake.

Pumpkins



Selecting

When choosing fresh pumpkins for cooking, avoid the large carving varieties, which are thin-walled, stringy and tasteless. The best cooking varieties are small but heavy for their size, about 5 to 7 pounds. Make sure they have at least an inch of stem (the longer the better) and have no blemishes or soft spots. Shape is not important. As a rule of thumb, for each pound of raw, untrimmed pumpkin, you'll get approximately one cup of purée.

Storing

Store pumpkins up to one month in a cool, dry place such as a spare room or covered porch. The flesh tends to become stringy at temperatures above 60°F. And, if you can spare the space, they may also be refrigerated for up to one month.



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Using

Pumpkins can be diced and steamed as a side vegetable; mixed with fruits, such as apples, pears or rhubarb; used in pot pies, soufflés, salads and soups; combined with grains for delicious casseroles; or made into cakes, breads, muffins, custards and pumpkin pie.

Nutrition Information

Pumpkins are 90% water. They are high in vitamin A and a good source of fibre, vitamins C and E, and many other essential vitamins and minerals.

Fast Fact

As of 2004, the world's largest pumpkin weighed in at a whopping 1,446 lbs.

Radishes



Selecting

There are several varieties of radishes, the most common being oval-shaped and red-skinned. Daikon is an oriental radish that resembles a fat, white carrot. Look for radishes with unblemished and brightly coloured skin (in the case of red ones), a firm and compact texture, and short, bright green leaves.

Storing

Radishes will not keep as well with their tops left on, so remove the tops before storing. They will keep for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.



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Using

Radishes are most often used in salads or as a garnish. Daikon radish is also often used in sushi rolls, and is delicious braised in a bit of sesame oil.

Nutrition Information

Red radishes are a great source of vitamin C and are rich in minerals like sulphur, iron and iodine. Daikon is even better with vitamin C, potassium, magnesium and folate, as well as sulphur, iron and iodine.

Rhubarb



Selecting

Common varieties of rhubarb range in colour from pale green to pink to deep red. Colour is not an indication of quality or flavour. Look for rhubarb that is firm, crisp and glossy. Avoid limp, dull-coloured stalks. Stalks more than 1 ¼ inches thick may be tough and fibrous, though some green varieties are tender at even larger dimensions. There are two main types of rhubarb found in markets: field grown and hothouse. Field grown is available from April through September and has more intense flavour and colour. Hothouse, or greenhouse, rhubarb extends the season at both ends and can be found nearly year round in some areas. Hothouse rhubarb is a bit sweeter, more tender and the stalks are not quite as firm.

Storing

Fresh rhubarb stalks will keep in the refrigerator for four or five days, but it's best to use them as soon as possible, before they become flaccid. Rhubarb freezes quite well; simply cut it to a size appropriate for the container and place in the freezer. Frozen rhubarb will keep for up to nine months.

Using

Rhubarb is always sold with the leaves cut off, but if you grow your own or get it from a neighbour, be sure to completely remove all traces of the leaves, since they contain oxalic acid, a corrosive toxin. Before cooking with rhubarb, remove any trace of the leaf and cut off about 1 inch of the bottom along with any discoloured areas. Rhubarb is extraordinarily tart and sour and is always used in conjunction with a sweetener. Rhubarb's earthy tartness can be incorporated into savoury dishes as well, turning stews or ordinary chicken or pork dishes into an extraordinary flavour experience. One simple method



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is to cook rhubarb in sugar and use the resulting sauce as a marinade, serving sauce or stew ingredient.

Nutrition Information

Rhubarb is a source of magnesium, fibre, vitamins C and C, calcium, potassium and manganese.

Summer Squash



Selecting

For all varieties of summer squash, they should be heavy for their size with glossy, unblemished skins. Soft, thin skins are also an indicator of freshness and quality. Hard skins are over-mature with fibrous flesh and hard seeds.

Popular Winter Squash Varieties

Variety	Characteristics	Tips for Selecting
courgettes	similar to a cucumber in shape	small ones are more tender than large ones
Crookneck Squash	yellow skin, slender, curved neck, slightly sweet, meaty	choose those under 10 inches in length



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Straightneck	light green or yellow color	small ones are more tender than large ones
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Scallop (Patty Pan)	small, disk-shaped, scalloped edges, sweet, tender	should be harvested young
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Storing

Store unwashed summer squash in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator for no more than three or four days. Do not wash until you're ready to prepare them since moisture promotes decay. The flesh may be diced or grated and then frozen for long-term storage, but freezing breaks down the texture. Unless you intend to use frozen squash for baking, it should be blanched for two minutes prior to freezing.

Using

Peeling is not necessary. Larger squash and crookneck varieties may need to be cut in half and the seeds removed with a spoon prior to slicing. Due to its high water content, summer squash may need to be drained before being used in recipes where additional liquid is not desired. To do so: After cutting, salt lightly and place in a colander in the sink for about 20 minutes, then rinse thoroughly and pat dry. Summer squash is versatile—amenable to steaming, grilling, boiling, frying, sautéing or stir-frying regardless of variety. It is a good addition to vegetable medleys, complementing tomatoes, onions, peppers and okra. Light summer ratatouilles are an especially good use for fresh squash. Large, over-mature zucchini may be used in cakes or other baked goods to add moisture to the recipe.

Nutrition Information

Summer squash varieties are a source of fibre, iron, manganese, magnesium, potassium, phosphorous, riboflavin, niacin, zinc, and vitamins A, B6 and C.

Sweet Potatoes, Yams



Selecting

There are two basic types of sweet potato: Moist (orange-fleshed) and dry (yellow-fleshed). The moist-fleshed potatoes are often called "yams." (The true yam is large—up to 100 pounds—and is grown in Africa and Asia, but rarely seen in the western world. However, common usage has made the term "yams" acceptable when referring to the orange sweet potato.) Look for firm, medium-sized sweet potatoes that are tapered at both ends. Skin should be smooth without brown spots.



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Storing

Sweet potatoes spoil faster than regular spuds. Store them at room temperature with good ventilation (for instance in a single layer in a wire basket). Use them within two to three days or one week at the very most. Sweet potatoes should not be stored in the refrigerator, but do well in dry, dark conditions around 55°F.

Using

Always use a stainless steel knife when cutting a sweet potato. Using a carbon blade will cause it to darken. When peeling, be sure to go deep enough to remove the hard layer beneath the skin.

Nutrition Information

Sweet potatoes are an excellent source of vitamin A, as well as fibre, protein, vitamin C, iron and calcium.

Turnips



Selecting

Turnips come in an astonishing range of shapes and sizes, depending on the age and variety. The flesh can be white or yellow, but most turnips have white flesh. Look for small turnips with smooth skin and firm flesh. Avoid those that are misshapen or have soft, spongy, forked or branched roots. Attached greens (if any) should be bright and fresh.

Storing

Store turnips in a cool, well-ventilated storage area for up to two weeks, or wrap them tightly in a plastic bag and refrigerate them up to one week. Cut off turnip greens, bag them separately and store them in the refrigerator crisper; they will keep for about a week.



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Using

Turnips can be used much like potatoes—boiled, roasted, shredded or mashed. Turnip Greens can be cooked a variety of ways; one of the most widely known is Southern-style, boiled in water or stock with various flavourings added until they are thoroughly cooked and silky smooth.

Nutrition Information

Turnips are a source of fibre, vitamin C, manganese, vitamin B6, folate, calcium, potassium and copper.

Winter Squash

Butternut Squash



Selecting

Winter squash, also known as hard squash, are available in a variety of shapes, colours and sizes. Choose winter squash that are firm, heavy for their size, and that have hard, tough skin with no cuts, punctures, sunken spots or mould. A tender rind indicates immaturity, which is undesirable in winter squash.

Popular Winter Squash Varieties

Variety	Characteristics	Recommended Use
Acorn	small, deep green or pumpkin-coloured	bake and stuff or drizzle with butter, maple syrup and cinnamon
Blue Hubbard	large, attractive	great for stuffing
Buttercup	round, green, firm	delicious with fruit stuffing or add chunks to



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soups

Butternut	orange, peanut-shaped	high in vitamin A, mash, bake, add cubes to stews
Delicata	small, cylindrical, striped skin	ideal for baking or whipped with applesauce and brown sugar
Gold Nugget	tiny pumpkin shape, firm, sweet, buttery flavour	cook before cutting
Hubbard	large, mottled skin	cook, mash and mix with sautéed garlic, leeks and sage
Kabocha	green rind with light streaks	bake, steam, remove seeds before cooking
Red Kuri	bright orange, hard shell	hearty, firm flesh is ideal for less sweet recipes
Spaghetti Squash	semi-soft, yellow, round, sweet	boil, bake or steam, add to pastas and salads
Sweet Dumpling	light, dark green, firm, sweet, rich flesh	bake and stuff with sautéed peppers and goat cheese
Turban	bright orange colour, fairly sweet	bake, mash, purée, steam or stuff, popular as ornamental

Storing

Winter squash can be stored at room temperature in a cool, dry place for a month or more. After cutting, wrap it tightly in plastic and refrigerate.

Using

A 1 ½-pound trimmed squash provides about four servings. Similar cooking methods can be employed for most types of winter squash. To bake, cut the squash in half, scoop out the seeds and place each half cut side down in ½ inch of water. Roast it by peeling and cutting it into chunks. Purée winter squash and use it to thicken soups and sauces. Winter squashes generally pair well with cardamom, cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, ginger, honey, brown sugar, maple syrup, fruit juice, toasted nuts, raisins, apples, onions and parmesan cheese.



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Nutrition Information

Most winter squash are a good source of vitamin A (beta carotene), vitamin C, niacin, phosphorus and potassium.