



Storing Fruits and Vegetables

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If you are like most people with a large garden, you probably find yourself overwhelmed by an abundance of fruits at this time of the year. Here are a few hints to help you store and enjoy your fresh produce after the growing season is over.

Just before the first frost, pick unbruised and undamaged mature-green tomatoes for storage. You can identify the mature-green tomatoes by their whitish-green color. When you cut the fruit, you will notice the seeds and the seed cavity are covered with gel. If the gel has not formed, the fruits are still immature. Immature tomato fruits will not turn full-red after they are picked, and they definitely cannot be stored for very long.

The best storage temperature for green tomatoes is around 55F. Usually, a well-ventilated underground basement is suitable. Store the fruits in a single layer. Avoid storing carrots, cucumbers, or lettuce with tomatoes because tomato fruits give off ethylene, which causes bitterness in carrots and makes cucumbers and lettuce turn yellow.

Check the fruits at least once a week and remove the diseased and bruised ones. If you would like to ripen some of the fruits, put them in a paper bag with a ripe apple or banana at 70 to 80F (on top of the refrigerator) for few days.

Apples and pears can be stored for up to four months depending on variety, relative humidity, and storage temperature. The ideal environment for these fruits is in a refrigerator at 32F, with the humidity close to 100 percent.

If you have more fruit than your refrigerator can hold, place the excess in plastic bags with holes. You can punch holes 2 inches apart in the plastic bags with a paper puncher. By putting the fruits in a plastic bag, the air around them will have less oxygen and more carbon dioxide and relative humidity. Under low oxygen and high carbon dioxide, the metabolism of the fruits slows down, so they can be stored for a long time.

After the fruits have been placed in plastic bags, put them in a cardboard box and store them in the coldest area in the house, preferably in the dark. Examine the fruits once a week and remove the diseased and ripened ones. Pears can be ripened by placing them at room temperature for a few days.

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