

Fresh picks for summer

Fruits and vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet. And it's so easy to put these nutritious foods on your plate in the summertime. Choice is huge, flavor is at its peak and price is often at the lowest.

You can reach your fruit and vegetable goal

It's hard to dispute the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables:

- They add vitamins, minerals and beneficial plant chemicals to your diet.
- They help reduce the risk for heart disease, stroke and some cancers.
- Nearly all fruits and veggies are low in calories and provide fiber, which helps with healthy weight management.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020¹ recommend a daily target of 2½ cups vegetables and 2 cups fruit per day for adults at the 2,000-calorie level. The MyPlate initiative offers a visual reminder to cover half of your plate with vegetables and fruit to help you reach this goal.

Ground rules for picking

Here's how to find the best summer has to offer:

- Explore locally grown produce. You'll likely find the freshest selection at farmers' markets and farm stands if they are available in your area. Many supermarkets have locally sourced options too.
- Use your eyes, nose and hands. Select produce with good color and no off odors. Fruits and veggies should feel heavy for their size.
- Talk it up! If you're at the farmers' market, ask growers about their favorite varieties and preparation tips. Or if you're at the supermarket, talk to the produce manager.



Try heirloom varieties

Generally, big seed companies and growers have favored uniformity. They chose varieties that ripened at the same time and shipped well. That is changing, especially for small-scale growers and home gardeners.

Since the 1970s, vintage varieties of fruits and vegetables have been making their way back into the marketplace. These heirloom plants offer superb flavor, often in rainbow colors and unusual shapes.

Take tomatoes, for instance. Heirloom tomatoes don't just come in tomato red. You'll find pink, yellow, purple, green and almost black. Some varieties are tiny, others the size of softballs. The deep, rich flavor varies from sweet to acidic. There are more than 3,000 heirloom tomato varieties in active cultivation around the world. "Green Zebra," "German Red Strawberry" and "Amana Orange" are three tasty favorites.



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Your practical guide to summer's top fruits and veggies

Green beans

Selection: Snap a bean in half to check tenderness. Taste it to check sweetness. Purple snap beans turn green when cooked.

Storage: Refrigerate in an open plastic bag for up to five days.

Serving Tip: Steam beans until tender-crisp. Sprinkle lightly with low-sodium teriyaki sauce and sesame seeds.

Melons

Selection: Choose a melon that feels heavy in your hand. Sniff the stem end — it should have a sweet scent. Avoid melons with soft spots.

Storage: Store unripe melons at room temperature. Once ripe or cut, wrap in plastic and refrigerate for a day or two.

Serving Tip: Combine mixed melon pieces, a squeeze of lemon juice and fresh mint for a refreshing salad.

Peaches and nectarines

Selection: Look for plump fruit that gives slightly to the touch. Avoid rock-hard peaches.

Storage: Store ripe fruit in plastic and refrigerate. Eat within two or three days.

Serving Tip: Grilled peaches are one of the great joys of summer. Cook peach halves over low heat on a gas grill. Serve with a spoonful of Greek yogurt.

Raspberries and blackberries

Selection: Look for berries that are plump and firm. Avoid soft or moldy ones. If you're picking berries, pick early in the morning and refrigerate as soon as possible.

Storage: Berries are highly perishable. Eat them the day they are picked or spread in a single layer on a tray lined with paper towels, and keep in the fridge for a day or two.

Serving Tip: Layer berries and low-fat lemon yogurt in a tall glass for a parfait.

Summer squash

Selection: From zucchini to yellow squash to pattypan, choose smaller, firm squashes with smooth, glossy skins. (Avoid zucchinis the size of your forearm!)

Storage: Refrigerate in vented plastic. Use within the week.

Serving Tip: Brush thick slices of squash with olive oil and grill 5 minutes per side. Top with basil pesto.

Sweet corn

Selection: Look for fresh, green corn husks with plump, juicy kernels.

Storage: Fresh corn is best eaten within a day or two of picking if possible. Refrigerate in plastic with husks intact.

Serving Tip: Peel back husks and remove corn silk. Sprinkle cobs with water and fold husks back over kernels. Grill or roast at high heat for 10 minutes for a great nutty flavor.

Tomatoes

Selection: Buy firm, bright, fragrant tomatoes. For a taste treat, try a different heirloom tomato each week.

Storage: Place tomatoes on a windowsill to ripen if too green. Store at room temperature. Eat within a week. Refrigerate only when very ripe.

Serving Tip: Quickly broil thick tomato slices with garlic and basil.

Sources

1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015 – 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. 2015.

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U.S. Department of Agriculture, Suzanne DeMuth, Vegetables and Fruit: A Guide to Heirloom Varieties and Community-Based Stewardship, March 1999.