



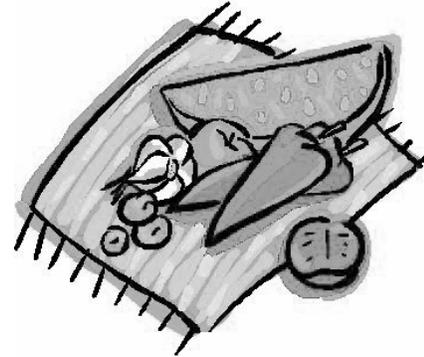
Safety First in Handling of Fruits and Vegetables

Stanley T. Omaye, Professor & Extension Specialist*

Although the U.S. food supply in the United States is one of the safest in the world, in the fall of 2006, a dangerous strain of bacteria caused a widespread outbreak of food poisoning in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 199 cases in 26 states, resulting in 102 hospitalizations and three deaths. Therefore, it is very important that consumers hold fast to careful handling and preparation of food. Since, in many segments of our society, produce is eaten fresh as part of a healthy diet, we must take steps to lower our risk from foodborne illness. This publication provides information that will aid you in protecting yourself and others from harmful bacteria that can be found in produce.

At the market:

- Avoid bruised, shriveled or any produce that looks or smells bad. Buy only what you can use in a few days. However, citrus fruits, apples, and potatoes can be bought in larger quantities because they can be stored for longer periods.
- Separate produce from meat, poultry, or fish to avoid spreading harmful bacteria between them (cross-contamination)
- Stack produce on top in the grocery cart, avoiding bruising.



At your home:

- Store produce promptly in the refrigerator crisper compartment.
- Store meat, poultry, and fish in a clean meat drawer away from produce to avoid cross-contamination.

Produce preparation:

- Wash hands.



Wash hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds both before and after handling produce. Use a clean cloth or disposable towel for drying your hands.

- Wash sinks, counter areas, and utensils.
 - Clean sink and cutting boards with hot, soapy water before and after washing and preparing produce

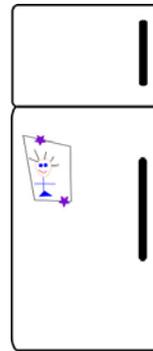
- Use different cutting boards for produce and meat, poultry, or fish.
- Always wash utensils after use in hot soapy water.
- Sanitize work areas and utensils periodically with either boiling water or a chlorine bleach solution (1 teaspoon bleach to 1 gallon of warm water)
- **Wash all produce.**
 - Wash before you use produce. The exceptions are leafy green-like lettuce, which are best washed before storing in the refrigerator. This will keep them crisp.
 - Even if you are eventually going to peel or cut produce, wash thoroughly. Even if the produce is organically grown or from a farmer's market, or from your own garden, wash thoroughly. Use a stiff brush to scrub thick-skinned produce (squash, potatoes).
 - Wash produce under running cold water. Remove outer green leaves from items like lettuce, and spinach. Trim the hull or stem after washing, e.g., for tomatoes, strawberries.
 - Detergents and commercial produce washes are not recommended, because they can leave residue on the outside surface of produce. Also, soaking produce in water is not recommended because there is a potential for cross-contamination.
 - Precut or prewashed produce from open containers should be washed under running cold water. If you prefer as an added

precaution, ready-to-eat, prewashed bagged produce can be washed again under cold running water.

- Finally, if you used a cutting board and other utensils for preparing produce, they should be cleaned and sanitized with bleach and water.

Leftover Produce

Cut or peeled produce need to be stored in the refrigerator in clean containers. Items should be consumed within a few days before spoilage.



References:

Bruhn, C., Li-Cohen, A., and Spitler-Kashuba, A., 2004. Safe handling of Fruits and vegetables. University of California, Davis, Publication #8121.

FDA. 2007. Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards of Fresh-cut Fruits and Vegetables. Web Site: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodgui3.html>

Partnership for Food Safety Education at: www.fightbac.org.

Contact S. T. Omaye at:

*Department of Nutrition, Mail Stop 142
 University of Nevada, Reno 89557
 Tel: 775-784-6447
 Fax: 775-784-6440
 Email: omaye@unr.edu