

How To Pick The Freshest Produce

Many of us tend to get a little frustrated when the person in front of us is selecting their fruit and vegetables by touching each and every piece available, smelling it, squeezing it and sometimes even shaking it! However there is method in what may seem like madness. Most fruits and vegetables give us signs as to whether they are going to be delicious or not and how long they will last.

It can be incredibly frustrating when you have been out buying your week's worth of produce only to have it go bad over the next couple of days. Obviously some fresh produce will last longer than others, but there are some key tips that can help you ensure you are selecting the freshest and most delicious options from what is available!

Firstly, it is important to note that most fruits and vegetables fall into two categories; ***climacteric*** and ***nonclimacteric*** produce. Quite simply climacteric foods are okay to pick whilst still slightly unripe, as they will continue to ripen off the vine/tree. Nonclimacteric foods however, such as strawberries, grapes and watermelon, will not ripen past the point that they were picked. So if you select a punnet of greenish strawberries, that is how they are going to stay.

Brown Spots and Markings: Generally brown spots are not a good thing when selecting fruit, as they are often the results of bruising or decay, however there are some exceptions to this rule. Peaches can sometimes have darker patches on their skin that are known as 'sugar spots', this is where the sun has had most contact and has formed a sweet section. Many other organic produce, such as apples and potatoes, can have small markings on them, yet still be fresh and very delicious!

Soft vs Firm: Depending on type of produce you are selecting and the time frame you would like it to last, some produce is better selected slightly soft or still firm. If you are selecting stone fruit, including avocados, then try and select a variety so that you can keep enjoying them as they ripen over the following week, avoid selecting ones that are hard as rocks. With all stone fruit, avoid selecting ones that have specific soft spots as this usually indicates that they are bruised and going bad.

Smell: Fruits such as cantaloupe and honeydew melons can be selected by their smell. If you smell the place the stem came from and notice the subtle slight sweet smell of the fruit, it is a good sign. If the smell is sickly sweet, it may be that the melon is over ripe or will need to be eaten very soon. (Also when for melons, if the stem is still attached, look for one that has withered because this means it was able to fully ripen on the vine).

Colour: Make sure you select fruits and vegetables that are their natural ripe colour, avoiding fruits or vegetables that have turned a darker colour and of course any that appear to have mould on them. Bananas are sometimes an exception to this rule, depending on your preference. If you like very sweet and ripe bananas, and you intend to eat them soon, or cook with them, then selecting bananas that are darker yellow and even slightly more brown might be ideal for you.

Using some of the fresh fruits and greens that are in season now, try this delicious salad to welcome you into Spring:

Peach, Feta, Prosciutto and Arugula Salad



Ingredients:

Salad:

- 2 large handfuls of arugula (rocket)
- 2 ripe peaches sliced into segments
- ¼ pound soft goats or cows feta cheese, broken into chunks
- 1 oz hazelnuts, unsalted and slightly crushed
- 5 slices of prosciutto chopped into small pieces

Dressing:

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ tablespoon lemon juice

- ½ tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- ½ tablespoon honey
- Pinch of salt and pepper to taste

Method:

Combine the salad ingredients together in a large bowl. In a separate jar, mix the salad ingredients together and then shake well to mix. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss all the ingredients together gently, ready to serve.

Tips: If hazelnuts are not for you, try lightly crushed walnuts or even lightly toasted pine nuts for different flavours to complement your salad!