

Storing Fall Vegetables for Food Safety

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Fall fruits and vegetables like apples, carrots, pumpkins, winter squash and onions store well over the winter months. Controlling several conditions can help prevent spoilage and lengthen storage time.

Temperature: The best temperature range for storage is 32° - 40° F. An “extra” refrigerator is a perfect place, if you have one available. Root crops like carrots can stay in the ground until needed as long as the soil doesn’t go below 25°F. This keeps the produce close to dormant and slows enzymes that decay the items.

Humidity: The best humidity range for storage is 50 -70%--hard to do in Colorado! Higher humidity leads to mold and decay. Lower humidity leads to withering.

Air circulation: Although it sounds counter-productive to maintaining humidity, allow air circulation to prevent conditions that encourage bacterial spoilage.

Safety: Avoid long term storage of produce with breaks, soft spots, bruises, mold or other decay. Use damaged produce soon after harvesting. The saying is “one bad apple...”, you can finish the rest!

Special Considerations:

Tomatoes: Do NOT can tomatoes harvested from frost-killed or dead vines (like the ones you hang in your garage!) Harvest green tomatoes and can or freeze them.

Potatoes: If potatoes have green areas, cut off the green areas and use immediately. Those areas make them bitter and can be potentially toxic. If they start to sprout, use soon. Potatoes can be preserved by freezing them. Wash potatoes well to avoid *C.botulinum* development.

Apples: Store apples separately from other produce. They produce ethylene gas that speeds up other produce’s enzymes and causes them to decay.

Every fall fruit and vegetable requires slightly different storage. For more storage ideas, see the CSU Extension fact sheet *Storage of Home-Grown Vegetables* at <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/07601.html> . Find guidelines for food preservation at http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/pubs.html#nutr_pres . If you have questions, please contact our office for more information.