

Shopping at Colorado Farmers' Markets

Fact Sheet 9.379

Food and Nutrition Series | Food Safety

By M. Bunning, E. Shackelton and S. Yeh*

Farmers' markets are known for being lively gathering spots where community members can enjoy one another's company and support local agriculture. Market vendors and artisans are a key part of our communities, and they work long hours to provide high-quality products.

Farmers' Market Shopping Tips

- Make a meal plan before you go. You may be able to find all the ingredients you need for several amazing dinners!
- Shop in good health and with clean hands. Only touch what you will buy.
- Go early for the best selection.
- Check out all the booths before making your choices. There is generally a large and colorful variety of produce and locally-made food products.
- Bring clean cloth shopping bags. They are sturdier and much better for items like winter squash and corn!
 - Insulated bags work well for cold or frozen foods.
- Wear comfortable clothing, shoes, and sunscreen.
- Take your time and get to know your local vendors and their foods. Many booths offer cooking tips or recipes.

- Try a new item each time you visit a farmers' market – you may discover a favorite food. Ask the vendor for handling and preparation instructions.
- Share the bounty – take some fruit or flowers to a friend or neighbor. Extra produce can also be frozen, dried or canned for out-of-season enjoyment.
- Go home soon after making your purchases in order to maintain peak quality. Bring a cooler with cold packs or ice to keep perishable foods cool on the way home. Place delicate produce, like leafy greens, on top of cold packs.

Food Safety Tips

At the Market

- Plan on buying perishable foods last during your trip to the market. What are perishable foods?
 - Foods such as eggs, cheese, meat, and cream pies that require refrigeration.
- Avoid cross-contamination between potentially hazardous foods and fresh foods like fruits and vegetables.
 - Place raw meat and poultry in individual bags to prevent them from contaminating ready-to-eat foods (liked baked products) and fresh produce.
- Keep hot foods, like roasted peppers, separate from other foods.



Quick Facts

- An abundance of flavorful, high quality produce is grown in Colorado.
- Shopping at farmers' markets offers opportunities to select 'just picked' fresh produce and try unique locally-made products.
- If available, consider purchasing extra fresh produce to preserve and enjoy throughout the year.
- Use CSU Extension's [Preserve Smart](#) to determine the elevation of your kitchen and find tested preservation recipes for over 56 types of fruits and vegetables.
- Colorado is known for its flavorful variety of fresh produce. Visit [Food Smart Colorado](#) for additional information related to using and enjoying Colorado grown produce.



**M. Bunning, Extension Food Safety Specialist and Professor, E. Shackelton, Extension Specialist, S. Yeh, graduate student, CSU Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition. Revised 1/21.*

On the Way Home

Bacteria can grow rapidly at warm temperatures and quickly cause a decrease in food quality and safety.

- Try to make the farmers' market the last stop on your list so you can go directly home.
- If it can't be your last stop, plan ahead and bring a cooler with cold packs for perishable items.

At Home: Fresh Produce Storage

- Rinsing produce before storing is not recommended as this may promote deterioration. Always rinse fresh fruits and vegetables with running water just before use.
- Store refrigerated produce in mesh bags or plastic bags with holes to let air circulate.
- Most fresh produce has a short shelf-life and should be used within a few days. See '[Food Storage for Safety and Quality](#)' for safe time limits that will help keep refrigerated produce from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat.
- All cut produce should be wrapped or covered and refrigerated to optimize safety and nutrition.
- Not all produce should be stored together. Apples, tomatoes, and melons produce ethylene gas and should be stored away from other produce.
- Store unripe peaches, plums, and apricots at room temperature in a paper bag until ripe. Refrigerating unripe produce slows down the ripening process.
- Whole tomatoes can be stored at room temperature until ripe.
- If you plan to preserve your market produce, use tested recipes that have been adjusted for elevation. The mobile-friendly [Preserve Smart](#) app provides canning, freezing, and drying methods and recipes and can be accessed while at the market to ensure you purchase the appropriate quantities for a recipe.

At Home: Fresh Produce Preparation

Fruits and vegetables are the foundation of a healthy diet but their surfaces can harbor harmful microorganisms. To promote health and safety, follow these tips for handling fresh produce:

- Start with clean hands and clean and sanitized cutting surfaces and utensils.
- Rinse leafy vegetables with cold water, leaf by leaf.
- Scrub tough produce (melons, potatoes, and carrots) with a clean firm brush under cold running water.
- Keep unwashed melon rinds and fruit peels away from edible or washed portions of fruit.
- Discard cut produce after two hours at room temperature.

NOTE: Using soap or bleach to clean produce is not recommended.

Resources

1. [9.310 Food Storage for Safety and Quality](#), Colorado State University Extension.
2. [9.369 Preventing E. coli from Garden to Plate](#), Colorado State University Extension.
3. [9.373 Health Benefits and Safe Handling of Salad Greens](#), Colorado State University Extension.
4. [9.380 Guide to Handling Fresh Produce](#), Colorado State University Extension.

More information on food safety, storage, and health benefits of fresh foods:

[Food Smart Colorado](#). A collection of information about food, nutrition and health, food safety, and various recipes and how-to's developed by CSU Extension.

[National Center for Home Food Preservation](#). A source for current research-based recommendations for most methods of home food preservation.

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