Storage of fresh vegetables

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The storage life of various types of vegetables can be extended by several days or even months, depending on the type, by keeping them at recommended temperature and humidity levels.

Storage places can be cellars, garages, outdoor banks, pits, or mounds. If cellars can be kept cold enough, they are usually better for prolonged storage. Areas in some basements will also remain cool enough (40 to 50°F) during the winter for storing many vegetables.

Temperature, humidity, and ventilation are important factors in vegetable storage. Different kinds of vegetables require different storage conditions; some need very cool temperatures, while others, such as tomatoes or squash, will be damaged by prolonged exposure to temperatures under 50°F. Table 1 gives storage requirements for some commonly stored vegetables.

Handle carefully to avoid bruising. Be sure all vegetables to be stored are free of disease, and periodically check stored produce to remove any rotted ones before the rot can spread to nearby produce

Most vegetables, except potatoes, cabbage, and cauliflower, will store longer and remain in better condition if placed in perforated polyethylene bags.

- Cabbage will store better if the entire plant is harvested and the roots placed in moist sand.
- Carrots, broccoli and cauliflower, cucumbers, lettuce, and acorn squash are sensitive to ethylene, which may be given off from apples and other fruit, so store them separately from fruit to avoid off-tastes and color.
- Green tomatoes that have reached full size and begun to lighten from dark to light green (known as "breaker" stage) are mature enough that they will continue ripening after harvest. Place them stem-down, with no more than two layers deep, on a padded surface. Storage at 55°F will adversely affect the taste of any tomato that is not fully ripe; no tomato, ripe or unripe, should be exposed to temperatures under 50F.
- Store potatoes in complete darkness to avoid tuber greening.

For help in selecting a preservation method, visit the SDSU Extension iGrow Food Safety and Preservation webpage or call AnswerLine at 1-888-393-6336 (in South Dakota). Additional harvest and storage information can be found in the USDA Handbook 66: Commercial Storage of Fruits, Vegetables, and Florist and Nursery Stocks, http://www.ba.ars.usda.gov/hb66/contents.html.

Table 1. STORAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR FRESH VEGETABLES						
	Cool & Humid	Cool & Dry	Humid	Warm & Humid	Warm & Dry	Storage Life
Temp.:	32-40°F	32-40°F	45°F	50-60°F	55-60°F	
Humidity:	95-98%	65%	95%	90%	65%	
CROP:						
Asparagus	X					2-3 wks.
Basil				X		1 wk.
Beans (dry)		X				1+ yrs.
Beans (green)			X			8-12 days
Beans (lima)	shelled-37-40°		un-shelled			1 wk.
Beets	X					4-10 mo.*
Broccoli	X					2-3 wks.
Cabbage	X					1-6 mo.
Carrots	X					5-6 mos.
Cauliflower	X					2-3 wks.
Cucumbers				X		1-2 wks.
Eggplants				X		1-2 wks.
Honeydew melons			X			3 wks.
Lettuce & other greens	X					1-2 wks.
Muskmelon (Cantaloupe)	X					10-14 days
Onions (bulb)		X				6-9 mos.
Onions (green)	X					7-10 days
Parsnips	X					4-6 mos.
Peas	X					1-2 wks.
Peppers			X			2-3 wks.
Potatoes			X			2-9 mos.**
Pumpkins					X	2-3 mos.
Radishes	X					3-4 wks.
Rutabagas	X					4-6 mos.
Squash (summer)			X			1-2 wks.
Squash (winter)					X	2-3 mos.
Sweet Corn	X					4-7 days
Sweet potatoes				X		6-9 mos.***
Tomatoes				X		2-14 days
Turnips	X					4-5 mos.
Watermelon				X		2-3 wks.

* 10-14 days if green tops are left on
** longer storage times require curing at 60-68 degrees for 1-2 wks., with gradual lowering of temperature thereafter
***Need to be cured at 82-86 degrees for 4-7 days, prior to storage

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