

From Garden to Pantry

An estimated 48 million Americans get sick every year from a foodborne illness, and 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die as a result. Increasingly, fresh produce is linked to these foodborne illnesses. You can take a few simple steps to make sure that you harvest safe produce to share as you **Make your Donation Count!** Food pantries can take steps to **Keep Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Healthy** for their guests.



Safe Produce for Food Pantries

MAKE YOUR DONATION COUNT

Safe Harvest. Home gardens can be contaminated with harmful microorganisms. These microorganisms can appear naturally in the soil or may be brought into the garden by pets, wildlife, a rain or flood event, or even people working in the garden. Whether you use organic or conventional gardening practices follow these simple steps:

- Locate your garden in fertile, uncontaminated soil, on well-drained land protected from a rain or flood event. Use best practices to control animals in the garden and when using organic fertilizers.
- Harvest to maintain quality and safety.
 - Always wash your hands before, and after, handling fresh produce.
 - Harvest in the coolest part of the day, usually in the early morning; hot weather means that produce will wilt and decay more rapidly.
 - Harvest when the ground is dry and not muddy. Heavily soiled produce items will decay more rapidly. If necessary, brush excess soil from root crops like carrots, potatoes, and beets. If produce must be rinsed to remove excess soil, follow these steps: use clean water, don't allow produce to soak in water, and dry fully before packing for transport; wet produce will rapidly decay.
 - Harvest ripe, unblemished produce. Produce that is heavily damaged will spoil more quickly and may allow for harmful bacteria to grow.
 - Place harvested produce into clean containers for delivery to the food pantry.

Garden-fresh produce items should be kept cool, but do not need to be refrigerated.

Safe Transport. Transport produce in a **clean vehicle** to maintain quality and safety.

- Keep harvest containers off counter-tops and other food contact surfaces. The bottoms of harvest containers can also 'carry' soil and potential pathogens into vehicles, and onto counter-tops and other food contact surfaces. Consider a plastic tarp placed in your vehicle to help prevent cross-contamination.
- Avoid stacking harvest containers; debris and soil from the bottom of one container can end up contaminating the container below.

A word about **gleaning**. Fresh, uncut produce that is gleaned from a retail operation, farm or garden, or market should be handled to protect quality and safety. See the tips for safe harvest (above). The **exception** is any cut/fresh-cut produce item such as cut melons, sliced strawberries, or chopped tomatoes. Any fresh fruits or vegetable that are cut **must be kept refrigerated** during transport and refrigerated once they reach the food bank or food pantry.

Time it Right! Fresh fruits and vegetables are highly perishable. To ensure that your donation counts, call the food pantry to schedule your delivery. Fresh fruits and vegetables that sit, often untended, for hours or days at a time, especially in warm summer weather, will rapidly decay.

Local food bank or food pantry: _____

Phone: _____

Hours of operation: _____

Notes: _____

KEEP IT FRESH AND HEALTHY

Whether you need to hold produce so that the food pantry is open for delivery or you simply want to distribute safe, high quality produce, there are some simple steps that will ensure that you **Keep it Fresh and Healthy**.

Receive Safe, High Quality Produce.

- Always wash your hands before handling fresh produce!
- Sort fresh produce as soon as it is received. It's true that 'one bad apple will spoil the whole bunch.' Discard visibly rotten or spoiled produce items. For many produce items, removing the one rotten or spoiled item will be sufficient, the remaining items may still be distributed. For instance, if there is one rotten potato in a bag or one molding orange, remove the one that is spoiled and distribute the rest. **To help prevent further decay**, the remaining produce should be rinsed in clean water, dried, and placed into a clean bag for distribution.
- Bags or boxes of produce without visible spoilage should **not be rinsed** but stored to prevent decay.

Storing Produce to Decrease Spoilage. Donations of fresh fruits and vegetables will generally arrive unrefrigerated; most produce items are refrigerated **only to protect and extend quality**. And some produce items don't like to be refrigerated. We've all noticed that items such as fresh bananas and sweet potatoes turn brown in the refrigerator, this is a sign of 'chill injury'. The browned items are still **safe to eat**, but these fruits or vegetables are telling us they don't like the cold! To ensure that fresh and healthy produce is distributed to food pantry guests, store fruits and vegetables to decrease the chance of spoilage and retain quality. Place fresh fruits and vegetables above raw meats in the refrigerator to prevent meat juices dripping on raw produce.

Store these Fruits and Vegetables at Room Temperature (below 75°F). Storing fresh produce at the ideal temperature for quality will extend shelf life. Check **daily** for signs of decay and move to the **refrigerator when items start to brown or soften**.

Apples	Apricots	Avocados	Bananas	Cantaloupe	Cassava (yuca)
Garlic	Ginger	Honeydew	Kiwi Fruit	Mangoes	Nectarines
Onions	Papaya	Peaches	Pears	Plums	Pomegranates
Pumpkins	Sweet Potatoes, Yams	Tomatoes	White Potatoes	Winter Squash	Watermelon

Store these Fruits and Vegetables in a Cool, Unrefrigerated Space (45-50°F). Each of these items will keep **best** if stored at ~50°F. If necessary, choose **room temperature storage** for 1-3 days - until signs of spoilage begin to appear or produce becomes overly ripe - then move to the **refrigerator**.

Basil and other Herbs	Cucumber	Eggplant	Green Beans	Peppers (sweet green and hot)	Pineapple
Summer Squash (zucchini, yellow squash)			Mandarins (Cuties), oranges, grapefruit, limes, lemons		

Store these Fruits and Vegetables in a Cooler/Refrigerator (40°F or below). May be held outside of the refrigerator for up to **4 hours** for transport and/or distribution to pantry guests. ***Must always be refrigerated.**

Asparagus	Beets	Berries (all kinds)	Broccoli	Brussels Sprouts	Cabbage
Carrots	Cauliflower	Celery	Cherries	Corn	Cut Produce* (all kinds)
Grapes	Green Peas or Limas	Leafy Greens (all kinds)	Mushrooms	Radishes	Sprouts*