



Rough or excessive handling can damage even the hardiest fruits and vegetables, and just any minor bruise can trigger spoiling, and very quickly its fresh flavor and appeal will be lost. Always practice keeping handling of your fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs to a minimum.

## 1. Receiving and Inspection Guidelines

Receiving and inspecting fresh produce is the first step to ensuring a quality end product for your customers, and a healthy profit for your business. Your establishment invests a significant amount of money in procuring quality produce to serve its customers, and your care and thoroughness in receiving and inspecting each shipment helps protect this investment. The right procedures and practices will help you reach these goals. We recommend the following receiving and handling checklist:

- Weigh carton and check against corporate product specs (when appropriate).
- Check for transit/product damage (spills, crushed cartons, damaged bags, etc.)
- Lift product case lids and check product for obvious defects such as decay, sizing, packs, etc.
- Check product temperature whenever possible using an electronic probe.
  - Probe bulk/commodity products at the thickest point (typically the butt of the product).
  - Probe fresh-cut products by placing the probe between two bags of product, pressing them together.
- Check for compliance with grades, counts & sizes on cartons/bags.
- Check for proper shipper/producer label (when appropriate).
- Check grades on cartons/bags against bill/invoice and against corporate product specs.
- Notify your manager, or appropriate individual, as soon as you notice a potential problem.

## 2. Storage Guidelines

Once you have determined that you have received the proper products, in the proper condition, move them immediately to a refrigerated cooler space set at 40°F. Remember, fresh fruits and vegetables are living, breathing organisms and should not be left out of the cooler for long periods of time. When storing products in the cooler, follow these basic rules:

- Store the higher respiring products (more delicate products), which require refrigeration, in the rear of the cold box, or that area of the cold box which maintains the coldest temperature, without freezing the products. Examples of such products would be: fresh-cut items, broccoli, mushrooms, berries, etc. Be certain to store those items requiring slightly warmer temperatures near the door of the cooler.
- Keep all products off the floor of the cold box/cooler for sanitation purposes, as well as for and good air flow around the products.
- Periodically map the temperature range of your cold box/cooler. Keep in mind the products are stored in the same cooler both through the night and early morning hours when there is less in and out traffic, and during peak activity time, when the doors are constantly open.
- Always leave products in their original shipping containers as long as possible to maintain quality and avoid product bruising/damage.
- Avoid stacking heavy products on top of lighter products.
- Avoid storing ethylene producing products such as apples and ripe melons near ethylene sensitive products such as leafy green lettuces in order to prevent premature decay and increased product shrink.

Proper rotation practices must be followed in order to keep produce fresh. Simply write the delivery date on the outside of every carton received and store the cartons so the date can be easily read. The oldest product should be used first according to the FIFO method (First-In, First-Out). Try to rotate your all your inventory in 2 days to maximize shelf life and freshness.

- Temperature fluctuates widely from front to back of the cooler due to the location of the cooling unit and frequency of the door being opened. Divide the cooler into three areas and store as noted below:
- Front (least cold): Apples, Basil, Cabbage, Cantaloupes, Carambola, citrus, cucumber, eggplants, Garlic, Honeydews, Jicama, Limes, Okra, Onions, Papayas, Pears, Peppers, Pineapples, Plums, Radishes, Rhubarb, Ripe Tomatoes (for short periods only), Zucchini.

- Middle (cold): Alfalfa, Apricots, Bean Sprouts, Berries, Carrots, Corn, Fresh-Cut Salads, Greens, Head Lettuce, Herbs, Kale, Leaf Lettuce, Parsnips, Ripe Nectarines, Ripe Peaches, Spinach.
- Back (coldest): Artichokes, Asparagus, Beets, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Cherries, Coconuts, Grapes, Green Onions, Kiwifruit, Mushrooms, Parsley, Peas, Turnips, Watercress
- Store at room temperature: Pineapples, bananas, papayas, pears, mangos, avocados but they should really be used upon arrival. Be careful not to over-buy; if you refrigerate a ripe tomato, it loses flavor.
- Leave outside of the cooler in an area no hotter than 72°F: potatoes, onions, garlic, ginger roots, rutabagas and yams.