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# SP527 A Guide To Buying Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

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A GUIDE TO BUYING

# Fresh Fruits & Vegetables

Blueberries  
\$1.99  
a pint



# A GUIDE TO BUYING Fresh Fruits & Vegetables

Betty Greer, Professor  
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**M**any varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables are available all year in almost every part of the state, because of excellent transportation and storage facilities. For the greatest nutritional value and flavor, however, choose fruits and vegetables at the peak of their freshness. The guide below will help you select fresh fruits and vegetables.

## Fruits

Fruit	Peak Season	Look For
Apples 	September - May	Good color for variety; firm to touch. Avoid those that are soft and mealy.
Apricots	June - July	Golden yellow; plump; firm. Avoid pale yellow or green, very hard or soft, shriveled and wilted ones.
Avocados	All year	Yield to gentle pressure; vary in size, shape and color from green to black. Brown markings on skin do not lower quality.
Bananas 	All year	Firm; bruise free; yellow touched with green. If needed, ripen at room temperature.

**Berries**

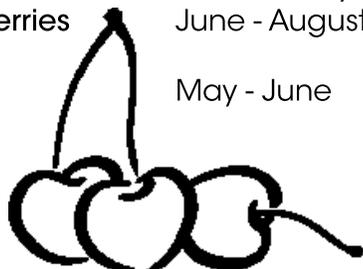
**Blueberries** June - August

Firm; plump; full-colored; bright, clean, fresh appearance. Only strawberries should have hull (stem cap) attached when mature.

**Cranberries** September - December  
March - July

**Strawberries** June - August

**Cherries** May - June



Fresh appearance; firm; good size for type of cherry.

**Coconuts** September - March

Good weight for the size; milk inside still fluid. If no milk, coconuts are spoiled. Avoid ones with moldy or wet-looking eyes.

**Figs** July - September

Fairly soft to touch. Use at once, spoils quickly. Sour odor indicates overripe fruit.

**Grapefruit** October - June

Firm; well-rounded; heavy for the size; smooth textured. Avoid coarse, puffy, rough-skinned fruit.

**Grapes** June - December



Fairly soft; tender; plump. Well-formed clusters with green, pliable stems. Darker varieties are free of green tinge; green grapes have a slight amber blush.

**Kiwi** June - August

Soft to touch, like avocado. Sometimes called Chinese gooseberries.

**Lemons** All year

Fairly firm; smooth and glossy-skinned; heavy for size.



**Limes** May - October

Heavy for size. Green variety more acidic than yellow.

Mangoes

April - August

Solid and not too soft to touch. Can vary in size from a plum to an apple and in color from yellow to red. Smooth skin often speckled with black. Green mangoes are sometimes used in cooking.

Melons

Cantaloupes

May - September

Color and aroma best guides. Delicate aroma; thick netting that stands out; yellow-tinged skin under the netting. No evidence of stem at blossom end.



Casabas

July - October  
furrows.

Buttery-yellow, wrinkled rinds, lengthwise

Crenshaws

July - October

Yellow-gold rind; pleasant aroma.

Honeydews

February - October

Creamy, yellow rinds; pleasant aroma.

Persians

July - October

Thick webbing; gray-green to brown skin under webbing.

Watermelons

May - August

Dull surfaces with cream-colored under-sides; symmetrical shape.



Nectarines and  
Peaches

June - September

Plump; fairly firm depending on type. Skin color white or yellow with a red blush.

Oranges

November - June

Heavy for size; firm; skins not too rough.



Papayas

All year

Greenish yellow to full yellow in color; flesh gives slightly when fruit pressed in palm of hand.

Pears

August - May

Yield to gentle pressure at stem end. Color ranges from creamy yellow to russet. Ripen at room temperature.

Persimmons

October - January

Firm; shapely; plump; orange-red color; attached stem cap. Handle gently. Looks like a large red tomato in shape and firmness.

Pineapples

February - August

Piney" aroma; golden yellow; slightly soft. Ripe when leaf is easily removed. Green fruit may not ripen properly. Over-mature fruit may show soft watery darker spots on the base or sides.



Plums

June - September

Plump; full-covered, soft enough to yield to slight pressure. Softening at tip is usually a sign that fruit is mature. Avoid shriveled and hard plums.

Pomegranates

September - November

Thin-skinned; bright purple-red; looks fresh.

Tangerines and Tangelos

November - January  
January - October

Deep orange or yellow; glossy skin. Loose skin. Overripe fruit has puffy, dry skin.

## Vegetables

**Vegetables**

**Peak Season**

**Look For**

Artichokes

March - May

Heavy, compact, plump globes. Large tightly closed, fleshy leaf scales. Good green color. Heavy for the size.

Asparagus

March - June

Tightly closed buds. Straight, tender, rich green stalks. Open tips and angular or ridged spears are signs of over maturity.



**Beans**

Green or Wax April - October

Crisp, long, straight, blemish-free pods.

Limas April - August

Bright color for the variety. Crisp, dark-green, well-filled pods.

**Beets** June - October

Firm, round, smooth, deep red-colored roots. Fresh-looking tops. Avoid those with long roots and rough, scaly areas on surface, because they are tough, fibrous and strong flavored.

**Belgian Endive** October - May

Firm without bruises. Color should be white with greenish cast.

**Broccoli** October - May

Firm, closed, dark-green florets. Firm, tender stalks. Yellowing green-colored heads of broccoli are over mature.



**Brussel Sprouts** October - November

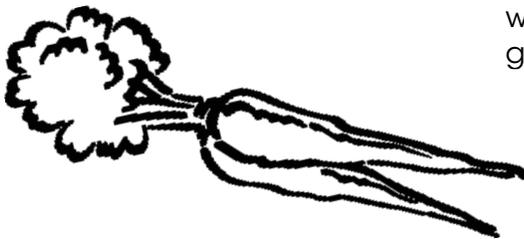
Miniature, compact, bright-green heads.

**Cabbage** All year

Well-trimmed, solid heads. Heavy for size.

**Carrots** All year

Firm; bright-colored; smooth; clean; well-shaped. Avoid rough, cracked or green-tinged roots.



**Cauliflower** September - November

Bright-green leaves enclosing firm, closely packed creamy-white curd or florets. Avoid bruised or open florets.



**Celery** All year

Fresh, crisp branches. Light green to green color. Should not have wilted, rough look or puffy feel to the stalk.

Corn

May - September

Fresh-leaved, green husks. Plump, milky kernels. Avoid cobs with small or large, dented or shrunken kernels



Cucumbers

May - August

Bright, shiny green; firm; well-shaped.

Eggplant

August - September

Firm; heavy; smooth; even dark purple. Free of bruises or cuts.

Lettuce

All year

Fresh green leaves with no wilted or bruised areas. Heading varieties of lettuce should be medium weight for size.

Mushrooms

November - April

Dry, firm caps and stems. Small brown spots or open caps are still good in flavor.

Okra

May - September

Tender, bright-green, bruise-free pods, less than 4 1/2 inches long. Pale, faded, hard pods are tough and fibrous.



Onions

All year

Well-shaped; hard; small necks. Dry, papery skins. Free of green spots or green-depressed leathery areas. Crisp green tops. Two- to 3-inch bleached-white roots.

Parsnips

October - April

Small to medium size; smooth-skinned; firm. Decay and bruise free.

Peas, green

April - July

Well-filled; bright green. Swollen, light-colored or gray-flecked pods contain tough, starchy peas.



Peppers

All year

Good shape; firm exterior; thick flesh and bright, glossy skin.

**Potatoes**  
White

All year



Fairly smooth; well-shaped; firm. Free of most blemishes. Avoid bruised, sprouting, shriveled or green-tinged.

**Sweet**

September - December

Thick, chunky, medium-sized with no bruises or decay. Should taper at the end.

**Radishes**

May - July

Medium-sized (3/4- to 1-inch diameter); good red color; plump; round; firm; crisp. Bright-green tops.

**Spinach**

March - May

Large, bright, blemish-free leaves with good green color. Yellowing indicates the start of decay. Avoid leaves with coarse stems.

**Squash**

Summer

June - August

Bright color; smooth, glossy skin. Heavy for the size; firm; well-shaped.

Winter

September - November

Heavy for the size. Hard, good-colored, unblemished rind.

**Tomatoes**

May - August



Well-formed; blemish-free; plump. Over all rich red color and slight softness.

**Turnips and Rutabagas**

September - March

Small to medium size; smooth; firm; heavy. Few leaf scars at top and few fibrous roots at base. Purple-tinged white ones are turnips. Yellow-skinned, larger roots are rutabagas.

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, Handbook of Food Preparation.

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