

# factsheet

## From U-Picks to Your Home

### Careful Handling of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are a vital part of our daily diet and generally considered a safe food. Produce handled improperly can cause food related illness. Those at greatest risk of becoming ill are young children, the elderly and immunocompromised individuals. By taking simple precautions, people can prevent bacteria, viruses and parasites from causing a food-borne illness.



- Do not purchase cut fruit or melons that are not refrigerated or displayed on ice.
- Keep fruits and vegetables separate from raw meats and poultry in the grocery cart and be sure to pack them in separate bags at the checkout.
- On hot summer days make grocery shopping your last stop so that you can get all perishable items home as soon as possible.

### U-PICKS AND FARM MARKETS

- Keep your hands as clean as possible by washing with soap and water or, at the very least, using sanitary wipes.
- Do not eat or let your children eat berries or other fruits and vegetables until thoroughly washed.
- Use clean containers or bags for your fruits and vegetables. Never reuse plastic bags that contained raw meats or poultry.
- As fresh produce can spoil rapidly at warm temperatures, your fruit and vegetables should be kept as cool as possible and transported quickly so they can be refrigerated to 4°C (40°F) within a few hours of picking or purchasing.

### RETAIL GROCERY STORES

- Select only good quality produce that is not bruised, moldy, shriveled or slimy to the touch. Avoid any produce that smell bad.
- Buy only quantities of fruit and berries that you can use before they begin to spoil. Ask about their shelf life and storage instructions.
- Do not eat or let your children eat fruit or berries until they have been thoroughly washed.

### IN YOUR KITCHEN

- Immediately refrigerate perishable fruit and vegetables. Less perishable produce such as whole melons, apples, oranges, potatoes or fruit that is ripening can remain at room temperature.
- Store fruit and vegetables in the refrigerator above raw meats and poultry or in a crisper drawer so that juices from the meat will not drip on them.
- Always wash your hands before preparing fruit and vegetables for eating.
- Ensure that all work surfaces, including cutting boards and utensils, are clean and sanitized using a mild bleach solution (1 1/2 teaspoons of household bleach per litre of water).
- Remove and discard outer leaves of leafy vegetables to reduce risk of contamination.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables with cool running, drinkable water. Soaking is not as effective as using running water as this friction removes dirt and residue, and reduces contamination to a safe level. A clean produce brush can be used to scrub firm produce such as watermelons and cantaloupes, and vegetables that will be eaten with the peel.
- Using soaps or household detergents is not recommended for washing fruits and vegetables as they can leave unacceptable chemical residues.
- Refrigerate produce within two hours of peeling or cutting.

- Fruits and vegetables keep better if washed just prior to use, however if children are likely to snack on fruit from the refrigerator, it is recommended that the fruit be washed before being stored in the refrigerator.

## **SERVING FRESH FRUIT**

- Separate fruit and vegetables from raw meats or poultry to prevent cross contamination.
- Display all cut produce at 4°C (40°F) and discard any that has been at room temperature for longer than four hours.
- When serving melons, do not let the rind come in contact with the cut melon.
- When transporting cut and perishable fruit or vegetables to a picnic or gathering, place them in a cooler with ice or gel packs.

Three simple steps to keep fruit and vegetables a healthy, enjoyable food choice:

**Clean It** Clean hands, work surfaces and utensils. Clean fruit and vegetables under cold running water.

**Chill It** Refrigerate perishable fruit and vegetables especially cut fruit such as melons.

**Separate It** Keep fruit and vegetables separate from raw meats and poultry to prevent cross contamination. Remember, fruit and vegetables eaten raw do not have a cooking process to destroy harmful bacteria that may have been transferred.

For further information on food safety visit the  
Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture  
Food Safety website at  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsaf/foodsafety/>