

how to recognize the best-tasting produce

FRUITS	VEGETABLES
<p>APPLES Taut skin, very firm when gently pressed. Avoid those with soft spots or punctures. Flavor and texture vary widely among varieties. Seek them out at local farm stands or farmers' markets in the fall.</p>	<p>ASPARAGUS Thickness is a matter of taste. Choose bunches with tightly closed tips without flowering. Stalks should be bright green and firm. Avoid those with stalks that are flattened or wrinkled and feel hollow.</p>
<p>AVOCADOS Look for Hass, with bumpy, dark-green to almost black skin. When ripe, they will give to gentle pressure (pressing too hard will bruise the flesh). If you buy a firm one, store it at room temperature to ripen.</p>	<p>BEANS Pole: bright, firm, with no soft spots or wrinkles. Should snap when bent, with very small beans. Avoid tough skin. Shell: pods a bit leathery but firm; no yellowing. Beans should be easily felt through the pod.</p>
<p>BANANAS For flesh that's neither too firm nor too soft, pick those that are yellow all over, with no green, browning, or spots whatsoever, from stem to end. Store at room temperature to ripen further.</p>	<p>CORN Best served the day you buy it; don't refrigerate. Bright-green husks wrapped tightly around ear, with flowing, moist silk (not brown). Pull back husk; kernels should be small, shiny, firm, and tightly packed.</p>
<p>BERRIES Sneak a taste; watch out for mold and mush. Strawberries: fragrant, shiny, firm, not too big, green stems. Blueberries: firm, no green or red areas. Raspberries: full, just soft, but not oozing juice.</p>	<p>CUCUMBERS Look for firm, unwaxed Kirbys (which are nearly seedless) with variegated color from light to dark green, and without wrinkles or soft spots; best no more than 6 inches long. If Kirbys are unavailable, buy English.</p>
<p>GRAPEFRUIT AND ORANGES Heavy for their size. Navel oranges: Avoid severe bruises and soft spots. Juice oranges and grapefruit: taut, shiny skin. Through skin, you should be able to feel the sections inside.</p>	<p>EGGPLANT Flesh should give a bit when gently pressed, with no hard spots. Skin should be shiny, not shriveled, wrinkled, or mottled. Stems should be green. Use within a day or two. Don't refrigerate.</p>
<p>LEMONS AND LIMES Not much more than 3 inches from tip to stem; heavy for their size. Taut, thin skin; avoid those with very hard skin. Through skin, you should be able to feel the flesh inside. Should give slightly when pressed.</p>	<p>MESCLUN AND LETTUCES Mesclun: Dig down into bin for freshest greens. There should be no wilted leaves, or wet, mushy, or yellow spots. Romaine: dark green, narrow, stiff leaves. Butter lettuces: small, round, loosely formed heads.</p>
<p>MELONS Look for those that are fragrant and heavy. Press end opposite stem to feel for a bit of give. Watermelon: Avoid those with flat sides. Presliced, it should be deep red with about 1 inch of white rind.</p>	<p>ONIONS Look for dry, papery skins and flesh that is full and firm, especially at the stem end. Avoid any with mold, discoloration, or soft spots, or ones in net bags; select one by one. Store at room temperature.</p>
<p>PEARS Fragrant, with no soft spots, punctures, or bruises. To eat right away, they should give easily if pressed gently. For coming days, pick those with less give; ripen at room temperature. (Buy Bosc very firm.)</p>	<p>PEPPERS Bell: very firm all over with taut skin. Flesh should be thick without soft spots or wrinkles. Look for bright-green stems. Chiles: Any color you choose should be vibrant and wrinkle-free.</p>
<p>STONE FRUITS Fragrant, with taut skin. Avoid those with wrinkles and bruises. They should have some give when gently pressed; handle carefully, no more than 4 per bag. Leave firmer ones at room temperature to ripen.</p>	<p>POTATOES Firm, without any soft areas or wrinkled skin; avoid those with sprouting eyes, slits, or a green tinge. Avoid bags; choose individually. Buy all one size to cook evenly. Store at room temperature.</p>
<p>TOMATOES Best in season, from farm stands and farmers' markets. Taut skin, firm flesh, deep and even color (greenish coloring at stem end on heirlooms is okay). Avoid pale ones. Store at room temperature.</p>	<p>SUMMER SQUASH Yellow and green: Choose small to medium, 5 to 6 inches and not bulbous (large ones are watery or fibrous); should feel firm. Skin should be smooth, shiny. Patty pan: no bigger than 4 inches across.</p>