



Safe Handling of Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables can become contaminated from harmful bacteria that may be in the soil or water where produce grows or after it is harvested, such as during storage or preparation. The following safe handling practices can help prevent eating contaminated produce, which could lead to a foodborne illness.

- Obtain produce that is not bruised or damaged.
- Mushrooms and sprouts must be purchased from an approved source.
- Store fruits and vegetables above raw products.
- Store time/temperature control for safety (TCS) foods such as cut leafy greens (lettuce, spinach, kale, cabbage, etc.), cut melons (cantaloupe, watermelon, etc.), and cut tomatoes at 41°F or less, including pre-cut TCS foods.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize utensils, equipment, and other food-contact surfaces between working with raw products (meat, poultry, seafood) and ready-to-eat (RTE) products.
 - If possible use separate, designated cutting boards for produce, meat, poultry, seafood, etc.
 - If not possible, use cutting boards in order of cooking temperatures by cutting ready-to-eat foods first and those with high cooking temperatures last.

Preparing safe produce

- Properly wash hands.
- Wash produce under running water
 - Use of detergents, soaps, or commercial produce washes is not recommended.
- Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.
- After washing, dry produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel to further reduce bacteria.
- Many pre-cut, bagged, or packaged produce items are pre-washed and ready-to-eat. If so, it will be stated on the packaging, and you can use the produce without further washing.
- If you choose to wash produce marked as “pre-washed” or “ready-to-eat,” be sure that it does not come in contact with unclean surfaces or utensils. This will help to avoid cross contamination.
- Once the produce has been washed, employees should wear gloves or use another barrier to prevent bare hand contact with the now ready-to-eat food product.

Guidelines for Processing Fresh Cut Produce

TEMPERATURE CONTROL AND STORAGE

All produce, including fruits, vegetables and other fresh-cut produce components, (health food supplements, herbs, wheat germ, etc.), should be obtained from an identifiable, traceable and approved source.

- Fresh cut leafy greens, tomatoes, and melons must be stored below 41°F.
- Label with name of product and date of preparation. Discarded after 7 days.
- The storage unit(s) is clean and orderly.
- Condensers and catch pans underneath should be clean and sanitary.
- Routinely monitor refrigerated storage unit temperature by use of a continuous time temperature recording device or by periodic checks with a calibrated thermometer.
- Discard all unacceptable, temperature-abused, off-color, off-odor, off-condition, out-of-date or otherwise suspect product.
- RTE items are physically separated from products that require further handling or processing.
- Store food to prevent the potential for cross contamination from leakage between products.
- Condensation from cooler drip pans and other sources should not be allowed to contact products or packaging materials.
- Products are stored at least 6 inches above the floor and away from walls and the ceiling.
- Storage should not involve use of unsanitary containers, shelves, supports, pallets, etc.

PREPARATION, HANDLING AND DISPLAY

Special care must be taken in preparation of any fresh-cut produce to reduce the potential for bacterial contamination and/or growth of human pathogens. These include, but are not limited to, proper handwashing and glove use, cleaning and sanitizing food contact surfaces, the reduction of potential cross contamination and appropriate finished product holding temperatures.

- The preparation area, facilities and utensils should be designated and, where possible, dedicated to the fresh-cut produce operations.
- The preparation area should provide for the protection of trays, films, overstock, lids, etc. from physical, chemical or biological contaminants.
- The preparation schedule ensures that the product handling time at room temperature is minimized for those products considered potentially hazardous.
- Packaging material must be food grade and maintained in clean condition.
- Raw fruits and vegetables shall be thoroughly washed in water to remove soil and other contaminants.
- Packaged product information should conform to federal, state and local labeling requirements and includes instructions for proper storage and shelf-life.
- Employees handling fruit and vegetables should maintain proper personal hygiene.
- No bare hand contact with the finished product.
- Single use gloves should be used to prevent cross-contamination.
- Proper hand washing practices required.