



Cooking With Ma Caring for Your CSA Share: Don't Let Those Veggies Rot!

Joining a CSA has so many wonderful advantages. In addition to getting the freshest, high quality produce available, and supporting your local farmer, you also learn to eat seasonally. Often throughout the season you will find yourself with a seemingly endless supply of one or two vegetables for a few weeks only for those items to vanish the next. This is one of the joys and frustrations of eating in sync with nature. It does, however teach us to appreciate each vegetable as their time appears.

To get the most out of your share with minimal waste, it is important to know how to properly store and preserve the bounty when it arrives. My first advice is to learn as many new recipes as you can and get creative. You'll have no choice when you're up to your eyeballs in lettuce and cucumbers and squash at the peak of season. But you can't eat it all at once, so here are some practical tips on how to care for your share.

Let's begin with the most perishable items and work our way to the least perishable.

Eat Now!

This category of veggies should be eaten right away. They don't store well under any condition and lose flavor the longer you wait. The day you get it, make sure it ends up on your menu!

Veggies: Corn, fava beans, okra

Notes: The sugars in corn begin to convert into starch right after it's picked. Fava beans also lose their sweetness with time. Okra can turn mushy but if you must store it, a paper bag will keep it for a day or two.

Eat Quick

This applies to most greens. Some will last a bit longer than others but in general, they should be eaten within the first 3 days. The heartier greens will last only a few days longer before the leaves start yellowing so don't wait too long.

Veggies: Salad greens, arugula, spinach, lettuce, collards, kale, bok choy, Swiss chard

Storage tips:

- All greens can be stored in plastic bags loosely sealed to allow for evaporation. Excess moisture causes rotting.
- Make sure your greens and the bag they are stored in are dry. Wipe the leaves if they are wet and place a paper towel in the bag to absorb moisture.
- Do not wash greens until they are ready to be prepared
- Cover the entire veggie or exposed leaves will shrivel up
- Never store greens in the same drawer as fruits since fruits release ethylene gas that triggers deterioration in veggies

Notes: There is really no way to preserve salad greens or lettuce so they have to be eaten or shared.

Eat Soon but keep it Cool

These veggies are a bit heartier and last several days to one week when refrigerated.

Veggies: Cucumbers, peppers, summer squash, asparagus, fennel, cauliflower, broccoli, brussel sprouts, celery, green beans, sugar snap or snow peas

Storage tip:

- Place in dry plastic bags loosely sealed.

Eat Soon but leave in your Room

These veggies are best kept at room temperature. Refrigerating will ruin flavor and speed mushiness

Veggies: Tomatoes and Eggplant

Storage tips:

- Keep these goodies in a basket at room temperature. They will last several days depending on ripeness.
- Eat your overripe tomatoes first, under-ripe tomatoes will mature left on a kitchen counter.

Take Your Time

Root veggies can stay fresh for up to two weeks when properly stored.

Veggies: Beets, carrots, radishes, kohlrabi, celery root, rutabaga, parsnips, turnips

Storage tips:

- Removing greens from roots will prolong its life and prevent rotting
- A cool dry storage spot will keep roots for over a week or
- Store in loosely sealed plastic bags in the fridge

Store It

These are generally late season veggies that are meant to be stored for several weeks to be available over the winter months.

Veggies: Potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash, onions, garlic, pumpkin, cabbage

Storage tips:

- With the exception of cabbage, these veggies are best kept in a cool, well ventilated area, out of direct sunlight.
- Cabbage should be refrigerated in a loose plastic bag, they will last several weeks uncut
- New potatoes should be consumed within a week

Preserving Your Share

There will be times throughout the season that you'll be overwhelmed with a few items you just can't eat fast enough or have run out of creative ways of preparing. When that happens, preserve it. Whether you want to preserve a veggie because you can't stand another bite of it, or because you want to save some to enjoy after the season is over, preserving is easy and can be fun.

Ferment or Pickle (My favorite method)

- Fermenting using fresh vegetables pounded with sea salt releases natural lactic acid to sour and preserve veggies. This process not only extends the life of your veggies, but also increases nutritional value and transforms them deliciously
- You can ferment or pickle almost any hearty vegetable: green beans, cucumbers, cabbage, eggplant, all root veggies, garlic, onion, peppers, asparagus, okra, cauliflower, etc
- No special equipment is required except a clean mason jar and a wooden spoon.
- Use your own blend of spices and herbs to create unique flavors
- Salsa, chutneys and relish can all be creative ways to combine veggies
- Pickles can be eaten after a few weeks or preserved for months, even years.

Freeze

- Corn husked and cut off the cob can be frozen in plastic freezer bags, although they will lose a lot of flavor
- Broccoli, cauliflower and spinach can be frozen after blanching and squeezing out excess water
- Green peas and fresh beans can be frozen shucked
- Grate summer squash in pre-measured quantities for bread throughout the winter
- Mash or puree cooked winter squash or pumpkin to be saved for soups or pies.
- To reduce the amount of moisture built up in a freezer bag, squeeze and suck out the excess air before sealing. Use within 6 months.

Make Sauce

- This takes more work since you need to make sure you follow proper directions for canning to prevent botulism.
- Mason jars, tongs and a pot large enough to sterilize jars are required
- Making sauce is the best way to preserve tomatoes at the peak of season
- Jars of sauce do not need refrigeration but should be consumed within a year.

Dry

- Herbs and chili peppers can be easily hung in a dry cool place with good air circulation or on newspaper in the sun.
- Dry beans are also a nice winter treat, although they are usually dried on the vine

Marinate

- Hearty greens such as collards and kale can be chopped finely and marinated with spices and olive oil, but should be consumed within a week.
- Charred peppers or eggplant can also be marinated in oil and spices.
- Fresh herbs make lovely infused oils for cooking and seasoning, you can also use chili peppers and garlic.
- You can also use herbs to make flavored vinegars

Whatever method you choose to explore, experiment and be creative!
Eat well to be well!

By Martha Ma
Community Chef