

MODULE 2: SHOPPING & STORAGE | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 6

Countertop Storage

Remember that you can always refer to the Ingredients Index for selection and storage info on specific ingredients, but here's a general breakdown of ingredients to store on the countertop.

Unless otherwise specified, store the following fruits and veggies in hanging baskets, bowls, or directly on countertops:

Avocados

Usually, avocados need 1–4 days at home on the counter to finish ripening, but once ripe, they should be transferred to the fridge unwrapped to store for 5–7 days. How do you know an avocado is ripe? Most avocados found in grocery stores are the Haas variety, which when unripe has a dark green skin. Once that skin is almost entirely black and the avocado is firm in hand, but a little soft (without being too soft)—it gives a smidge when gently squeezed—it's ripe. If the skin is black and the avocado is too hard, wait a day or two, or speed up ripening by sealing in a brown bag to trap ethylene.

Bananas

Choose bananas based on their degree of ripeness and when you'll be using them. Green bananas will take about five days to ripen, yellow bananas are ripe and ready to eat, and yellow bananas with brown spots are ripe, sweeter, and should be eaten within a few days. Now, if you have a banana or three in a bunch that look like they may not make the end of the week, put them in the fridge. The peel will turn brown or black but don't fret, the fruit inside is A-OK to eat and use in recipes. You can also peel the spotted bananas and then freeze them—we have a few recipes up our sleeve for you.

Citrus

Citrus fruits including lemons, limes, and oranges can be stored for 1–2 weeks on the counter. Transfer to the fridge for 1–3 weeks once cut to store leftovers, or towards the end of their shelf life to extend. Spray or wipe rind with a ½ cup water to 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar mixture to keep mold away.

Onions, Shallots & Garlic

These alliums can be stored for 1–12 months depending on the warmth and humidity of the kitchen or pantry they're stored in. The warmer and more humid the storage is, the more likely onions and garlic are to become mushy or grow mold (or they may sprout, but then they're still ok to use), the cooler and drier the storage, the longer they last. This is why you may have heard of cellar storage for “wintering” onions. Keep them out of sunlight in the coolest, driest part of your counter or pantry. You can store whole onions in the fridge, but the dampness can compromise their shelf life rather than extend it.

For green onions (aka scallions), store them in the crisper drawer of your fridge for 1–3 weeks—they're the exception here. Cut or leftover raw onion can also be stored in the fridge for 1–3 weeks in an airtight container.

Pome Fruit

If you like the crisp, cool snap of a cold apple, by all means, store in the fridge, but pome fruits like quince, pear, and apple can be kept on a cool, dry counter out of sunlight for 2 weeks or more. For the fresh apple pickers: store a bounty of apples for up to five months in a fridge, fruit cellar, cool basement, or even the garage. Pro tip: individually wrap each apple in some brown paper, a beeswax wrap, or newsprint so if one spoils, it doesn't reach the others.

Store leftover cut pome fruit in an airtight container in the fridge, but before you do, spread some lemon juice or apple cider vinegar on the open flesh to halt or minimize oxidation (that browning we're all familiar with)—this step extends shelf life.

Potatoes

Potatoes should be stored in a cool, dry pantry, on the counter out of sunlight, or in a cool garage or basement. They can keep for months. If you see sprouts on a potato but the potato remains firm in hand, just pick off and discard the sprouts and eyes, and then use the potato in your recipe just like you normally would. But if the potato is shriveled, soft, and sprouting, start over with a new potato. Soft and shriveled potatoes just won't taste the same as firm ones. To prevent sprouting on long-stored potatoes, make sure you are storing them away from sunlight and keep them cool.

Sweet Potatoes & Yams

Even though they are often mislabeled, sweet potatoes and yams are two different species of root veggie. Sweet potatoes have a smooth purple, gold, white, or copper skin with orange or white flesh, while true yams will have a tough, dark, bark-like texture with white, purple, or red-orange flesh (they're sweeter, too). Both can be stored on the counter for weeks or in a cool basement or garage for months. Once cut, store them in an airtight container in the fridge for 1–2 weeks—you can brush the cut end with lemon juice or apple cider vinegar to discourage oxidation and mold if you like but these veggies hold up pretty well in the fridge without it.

Stone Fruit

With stone fruits, like peaches and cherries, always buy them mature and fully ripened. Stone fruits that are picked prematurely will never sweeten properly even though they do continue to ripen. They should be unblemished and firm, but yield to gentle pressure. They should also smell fragrant. If, while on the counter they start to seem overly ripe, transfer them to the crisper drawer in the fridge and you'll extend life for up to 7 days.

Summer Melon

A ripe melon like cantaloupe, honeydew, or watermelon should smell sweet and fruity, and it should feel heavy and have a thick rind that yields a bit when pressed. It's a good idea to spray or wipe melon rinds with a ½ cup water to 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar mixture to keep mold away. And if you bring one home that isn't quite ripe, wrap it in a brown bag and keep on the counter in a sunny spot for 1–4 days to speed up the process.

Once cut, store in the fridge for up to 5 days (give the cut side a squeeze of lemon and cover with parchment paper, beeswax wrap, or plastic wrap, to keep air out and minimize any browning or mushiness).

Tomatoes

These days you can find many varieties of tomatoes all year round, but depending on the season and how ripe the tomatoes were when picked, storage tips can vary. A good rule of thumb is to either buy them ripe or allow to ripen on the counter, and then transfer to the fridge once fully ripe for 3–5 days. If you store unripe tomatoes in the fridge they will likely turn mushy or mealy.

So, how can you tell when a tomato is fully ripe? Look for a rich color, smooth skin, a smell that is earthy, sweet, and tomato-y, and they should yield to slight pressure. And, when picking a tomato, go for one that feels heavy in your hand, not light and puffy (a sign of weak flavor).

Another pro tip: during the winter months, if your local store has tomatoes available, choose Roma as they'll have the best flavor.

Winter Squash

For winter squash like butternut, acorn, or spaghetti squash, a cool spot on the counter is fine for storage, but you can also store in a cool basement or garage for months, even a year if the conditions are right (somewhere between 50 – 60°F and 60 percent humidity). Spray or wipe the rind with a ½ cup water to 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar mixture to keep mold away if you like, but most winter squash are super hearty and won't need this precautionary step. When choosing long-necked squash like butternut, remember that the core is full of pith and seeds, so the longer the neck, the more seed-free squash meat you'll have to work with—this makes prep easier.

Winter squash can be large, so if you only cut a piece off for a quick meal, rub the open end with sea salt or lemon juice to naturally preserve it, wrap in parchment or a beeswax wrap and secure with a rubber band. Then move it to the fridge until you need a bit more.

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Lesson Actions

If you haven't already, spend some time diving into the Ingredient Index to learn more, then share with friends, family, or the course community one thing that you learned there or in this lesson that you're excited to put into practice and why.

Tell us what surprised you and write it all down in your cooking journal.