



# Mason County

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

## WSU Making A Difference

# Tips for Safe Handling of Fresh Produce

Summertime brings an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables, whether from your own garden, local farmers market or grocery store. As you enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables at home, follow these safe handling tips to help protect yourself and your family from food poisoning. It is important to be consistent in practicing safe food handling at home.

### **CHECK fresh produce for signs of cuts or bruising, where harmful bacteria can breed.**

- Check that the fresh fruits and vegetables you buy are not bruised or damaged.
- When choosing pre-cut fruits and vegetables like packaged salads and sliced melons, check that the product is refrigerated or on ice. Cut melons should be buried in ice or displayed in a refrigerated case, not just displayed on top of ice. Uncut melon does not need to be refrigerated.

### **RINSE fresh fruits and vegetables just before eating.**

- Just before use, rinse under running water only the fruits and vegetables you plan to eat, including those with skins or rinds that are not eaten.
- Firm-skinned fruits and vegetables should be rubbed by hand or scrubbed with a clean brush while rinsing under running tap water.
- Throw away the outer leaves of leafy vegetables such as lettuce and cabbage. Separate lettuce leaves and wash them individually.
- Fresh herbs and sprouts should also be rinsed before serving. Since sprouts have caused numerous foodborne illness outbreaks, people in high-risk groups (children, elderly and people with weakened immune systems) are advised not to eat sprouts.
- Packaged fruits and vegetables labeled “ready-to-eat,” “washed” or “triple washed” should not be washed, as industry practice for washing them is thorough and well-controlled. Kitchen sinks have been found to be the second most contaminated area in homes (kitchen sponges were first), so rinsing pre-washed greens could contaminate them.
- Before cutting melons, be sure the outer surface is washed with drinking water and dried with a paper towel. Otherwise, when you slice through them any bacteria on the outer surface can be transferred to the inner flesh.
- Do not use detergent or soap to wash produce. Because produce skins and peelings are porous, fruits and vegetables can absorb detergent residues, which are not deemed safe for consumption. If you choose to use a commercial vegetable wash

product follow the manufacturers' instructions. The products will clean the produce, but no research to date has indicated that it does any better job in removing bacteria than water.

- Dry fruits and vegetables with a clean paper towel that can be tossed away.

### **CHILL cut fresh produce within two hours to prevent bacteria growth.**

- Keep your refrigerator at or below 40°F.
- Refrigerate all cut, peeled or cooked fresh fruits and vegetables within two hours of preparing.
- Fruits with high acid content (apples, oranges, pineapples, and lemons) can stay at room temperature longer. The high acid content protects them from being potentially dangerous.

### **CLEAN hands, surfaces and utensils to prevent contamination.**

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Clean all surfaces and utensils with hot water and soap, including cutting boards and knives, before and after preparing fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Sanitize cutting boards via a dishwasher cycle, or after washing by hand using dilute chlorine.

### **SEPARATE produce from raw meat, seafood, poultry, eggs and household chemicals.**

- In your shopping cart and in bags at checkout, separate fresh fruits and vegetables from household chemicals and raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.
- In your refrigerator, keep fresh fruits and vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.
- When preparing food, keep fresh fruits and vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs. Do not use the same cutting board or utensils without cleaning with hot water and soap before and after preparing fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Consider designating a separate cutting board for fresh fruits and vegetables

### **THROW AWAY bruised, damaged or potentially cross-contaminated produce.**

- Throw away any fresh fruit and vegetables that have not been refrigerated within two hours of cutting peeling or cooking.
- Remove and throw away bruised or damaged portions of fruits and vegetables when preparing to cook them or before eating them raw.
- Throw away any fruit or vegetables that have touched raw meat, poultry, seafood or eggs.
- If in doubt, throw it out!

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**For more information regarding the Mason County WSU Extension office call [360-427-9670](tel:360-427-9670) Ext. 680, or visit our website at <http://mason.wsu.edu>**

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