Cucumbers and Peppers

As summer turns to fall we might not see the abundant variety of fresh vegetables found earlier, but still there are staples to be found in the garden, at produce stands and farmers markets.

Fresh Georgia cucumbers are available for six months each year, from May through November. Fun fact: cucumbers contain very few calories and are 95% water, so adding them to your favorite meal doesn't add any fat, sodium or cholesterol and they are also a good source of vitamin C. When selecting cucumbers choose firm, dark green, well-shaped cucumbers that are heavy for the size. You can refrigerate cucumbers in plastic bags up to one week.

You may find hot and mild varieties of peppers as well. Bell peppers are popular and may be eaten fresh or prepared with many dishes to add color, flavor and nutrition. In Georgia, bell peppers are available from mid-June through October. Bell peppers are low calorie, an excellent source of vitamin C and contain vitamin A. Choose firm, brightly colored peppers that are thick walled and heavy for their size. Bell peppers stored in the refrigerator crisper will stay fresh for up to two weeks.

Green, yellow and red bell peppers are also widely available. Green peppers are harvested before they reach maturity and eventually turn bright red if left on the plant. Yellow peppers are a different variety that are harvested when mature.

Ultimate Greek Chopped Salad

Ingredients

- 1 cucumber
- 4-5 ripe roma tomatoes
- 1 large red bell pepper
- 1 small red onion
- 15 oz. can garbanzo beans, rinsed and drained
- Optional: olives, feta, pepperoncini

For the dressing

- 3 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tsp. oregano
- 1/4 tsp. salt

Directions

1. For dressing: in a small bowl, combine all ingredients and whisk. Set aside.
2. Wash produce under cool running water, dice cucumber, onion, bell pepper, and tomatoes (remove excess tomato liquid)
3. Put diced vegetables and optional items in a large bowl.
4. Wipe off the top of the can, open, drain, rinse and add garbanzo beans to the bowl.
5. Add the dressing and toss to combine
6. Eat immediately or refrigerate for at least an hour to let flavors combine
7. Some dressing will settle on the bottom, so stir before serving

From: thegardengrazer.com

Food Safety in the Community Garden

Water

- Use water from an approved public water system or other regularly tested water source.
- Drip irrigation helps reduce water from splashing directly onto produce.
- Don't use untreated rainwater collected in rain barrels with edible plants.

Compost

- In the community garden use materials like leaves, grass clippings, eggshells, coffee grounds, hay and straw instead of manure for compost because there is less risk of pathogens.
- Secure any fertilizers/pesticides in a safe and locked location and follow label instructions using appropriate protective equipment.

Personal Hygiene

- Always wash hands before and after working in the garden. Handwashing stations should be available.
- Use clean hands or clean garden gloves while working in the garden.
- If water is not available, use disposable, single use gloves while harvesting.
- If hand sanitizers are used, they should be at least 60% alcohol. Be aware that hand sanitizers are not effective against Norovirus, which is one of the leading causes of food borne illness.

Harvesting

- Use plastic containers that can be washed and sanitized. Containers such as cardboard boxes and straw baskets can't be appropriately washed and sanitized.
- Clean tools regularly by washing and sanitizing. Keep all surfaces that come in contact with produce clean and sanitized.
- Sanitizer solution of 1 tablespoon plain unscented household bleach per gallon of water can be used.
- Do not eat produce or other food in the garden while working or harvesting. Mouths are a source of germs!

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At the Market or the Store

Check for Bruises

- Choose fruits and vegetables that are free of bruises or damage spots.

Keep Precut Produce Cold

- Choose precut and packaged fruits and vegetables that are refrigerated or on ice.

Separate

- Separate fruits and vegetables from raw meat, poultry and seafood in your shopping cart and in your grocery bags.

At Home

Wash

- Wash your hands before and after preparing fruits and vegetables.
- Wash or scrub all fruits and vegetables under running water before eating, cutting or cooking.
- Fruits and vegetables labeled pre-washed don't need to be washed again at home.

Keep Cold

- Refrigerate all cut, peeled or cooked fruits and vegetables as soon as possible, or within two hours.
- Use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure the temperature stays at 40°f or below.

Separate

- Store fruits and vegetables away from, and not next to or below, raw meat, poultry and seafood. These items can drip juices that may have harmful germs.
- Wash cutting boards, counter tops, and utensils with hot soapy water before and after preparing fruits and vegetables.

Factsheet author: Cindee Sweda, Spalding County

Sources: Georgia Department of Agriculture
Fruit and Vegetables for Better Health
UGA Extension Community Garden Food Safety
Partnership for Food Safety

Storage of Fresh Produce

Storing produce at the proper temperature is critical to obtaining the longest shelf-life. Table 1 provides the optimal storage temperature and shelf-life for each commodity. If a crop is stored at higher than ideal temperatures, the shelf-life will be reduced. Similarly, if a crop is stored at a lower than ideal temperature, freezing or chilling injury could compromise the shelf-life.

Table 1. Fruit and vegetable storage conditions and shelf-life.

Crop	Ideal Storage Temperature (°F)	Shelf-Life at Ideal Storage Temperature
Apples	30-40	1-12 months
Asparagus	32-35	2-3 weeks
Beans, Butter/Lima	37-41	5-7 days
Beans, Snap	40-45	7-10 days
Beets, Topped	32	4-6 months
Blackberries	31-32	2-3 days
Blueberries	31-32	1-2 weeks
Boysenberries	31-32	2-3 days
Broccoli	32	10-14 days
Brussels sprouts	32	3-5 weeks
Cabbage	32	3-6 weeks
Cantaloupe	32-36	5-14 days
Carrots, Mature	32	7-9 months
Cauliflower	32	3-4 weeks
Celery	32	2-3 months
Cherries	30-31	2-3 weeks
Collards	32	10-14 days
Corn	32	5-8 days
Cucumbers	50-55	10-14 days
Eggplant	46-54	1 week
Grapes	31-32	2-8 weeks
Kale	32	2-3 weeks
Lettuce	32	2-3 weeks
Mustard	32	10-14 days
Okra	45-50	7-10 days
Onions, Green	32	3-4 weeks
Onions, White	32	1-8 months
Parsnips	32	4-6 months
Peaches	31-32	2-4 weeks
Pears	29-31	2-7 months
Peas, English	32	1-2 weeks
Peas, Southern	40-41	6-8 days
Peppers, Bell	45-55	2-3 weeks
Plums	31-32	2-5 weeks
Potatoes, Irish	40	4-5 months
Potatoes, Sweet	55-60	4-7 months

Crop	Ideal Storage Temperature (°F)	Shelf-life at Ideal Storage Temperature
Pumpkins	50-55	2-3 months
Radish	32	3-4 weeks
Raspberries	31-32	2-3 days
Rhubarb	32	2-4 weeks
Rutabaga	32	4-6 months
Spinach	32	10-14 days
Squash, Summer	41-50	1-2 weeks
Squash, Winter	50-55	2-6 months
Strawberries	32	5-7 days
Tomatoes, Ripe	46-50	4-7 days
Tomatoes, Cherry	47-50	4-7 days
Turnips	32	4-5 months
Watermelon	50-60	2-3 weeks

From Hardenburg *et al.*, 1986. The Commercial Storage of Fruits, Vegetables, and Florist and Nursery Stocks. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Handbook No. 66 (revised) 130 p.

At times, even when crops have the same ideal storage temperature, they should not be stored together. Some crops (mainly true fruits) produce high levels of ethylene, the ripening hormone. Ethylene can compromise the quality and reduce the shelf-life of crops by causing bitterness, softening, discoloration and stem detachment. Moreover, onions and peppers can impart off-flavors to apples and potatoes, if they are stored together. Commodities also differ in ideal relative humidity conditions. Most fruits and vegetables are composed of more than 80 percent water; therefore, the higher the relative humidity in the air surrounding the commodity during storage, the longer the shelf-life. The ideal relative humidity for the majority of fruits and vegetables is 90-95 percent; however, root crops, like onions and garlic, will be damaged and decay more quickly at high humidity and should be stored at 65-75 percent relative humidity, if possible. Table 2 shows crop storage compatibility.

Table 2. Storage compatibility.

Group 1. Temperature 32-36 °F, Relative Humidity 90-95%				
Apples*	Berries	Grapes	Pears*	Rutabagas
Asian pears*	Cantaloupe*	Parsnips	Plums*	Turnips
Beets, topped	Cherries	Peaches*	Radishes	
***These items can produce high levels of ethylene that can be detrimental to items in Group 2.**				
Group 2. Temperature 32-36 °F, Relative Humidity 90-95%				
Beets, topped	Cabbage	Cherries	Greens	Radishes
Berries	Carrots	Corn	Lettuce	Rhubarb
Broccoli	Cauliflower	Grapes	Parsnips	Rutabagas
Brussels sprouts	Celery	Onions, Green	Peas	Turnips
Group 3. Temperature 32-36 °F, Relative Humidity 65-75%				
Garlic	Onions	Shallots		
Group 4. Temperature 50 °F, Relative Humidity 90-95%				
Beans†	Eggplant	Peppers	Squash, Summer	Tomatoes, Ripe
Cucumbers	Okra	Potatoes†	Squash, Winter	Watermelon
†Fifty degrees is slightly above ideal conditions for these commodities.				

Adapted from Boyhan *et al.*, 2009. Postharvest Handling and Transportation of Fruits and Vegetables. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet 100. 4 p.

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