



Tips for good handling practices of fresh produce in your store

Careful produce handling will help you maximize your sales by offering the freshest, most attractive produce to your customers. Here you will find a variety of tips for handling and merchandising your produce effectively.



A dry storage produce display

Rotation

Rotating your fresh produce is perhaps the most important thing you can do to ensure high quality products and success. A common rotation system is referred to as “first in first out,” (FIFO). This simply means that you should stock your fresh produce in the order that you received it. For example, make sure all of the tomatoes that were delivered on Monday are put out for sale before putting out tomatoes received on Wednesday.

Proper rotation is achieved by carefully removing all older product from the display, placing new, fresh product in the display and stacking the older (but good quality) product back on top of the newly displayed product.

Many retailers find it beneficial to write the delivery date on each box of fresh produce to be certain that everyone is aware of which product needs to be used first. Again, FIFO helps ensure quality and success.



A display at the register

Stocking

When putting produce on display, make sure that it is not stacked so thickly that air cannot circulate. If stacking produce in a refrigerated display case, be sure not to stack products so high that the top layer of produce is exposed to warm air. Delicate produce items should not be stacked more than two layers deep to avoid bruising, crushing or damaging the bottom layer.

Product conditions

Check your produce items a few times a day as you are going about your other duties in the store. Throw away any bruised, damaged, foul-smelling or shriveled items. It is hard to throw away inventory but your customers may not buy anything if their attention is drawn to the damaged produce in your display. Be sure to restock whenever the display starts to look empty. Empty displays look picked-over and unappealing.



A cooler display

Signage

It is important to draw attention to your produce offerings and make sure your shoppers can easily identify the produce items and their price.

Clearly communicating the price of your produce is very important. Customers dislike surprises at the register, so be sure to make attractive, easy-to-read signs. If you do not have a scale that customers can use to weigh fresh produce, you can usually sell produce by the unit. For instance, advertising “Apples: 2 for \$1.00” will let the customer know the exact price of what they are purchasing.

Ethylene-sensitive produce

Ethylene is a natural ripening gas given off by some fruits and vegetables. Ethylene causes certain fruits and vegetables to ripen faster, which can lead to over-ripening and spoilage. For this reason, you want to be careful that ethylene-producing items are kept away from ethylene-sensitive items and that your storage and display areas have good ventilation.

Items that produce ethylene are:

Apricots	Papayas
Avocados	Peaches
Bananas	Pears
Cantaloupe	Persimmon
Kiwifruit	Plums
Nectarines	Tomatoes

Icing

Some produce items can tolerate being displayed in crushed ice. While this is not a requirement, it may help the items last longer and give your produce display a fresh look. Be sure to ice only those items (listed below) that can tolerate freezing temperatures. Other produce items may be damaged by ice.

Produce items that can tolerate icing are:

Artichokes	Collard Greens
Asparagus	Corn
Broccoli	Kale
Carrots	Parsnips
Cauliflower	Spinach
Celery	



An attractive display near the register

This material was excerpted in part from the Network for a Healthy California Retail Program. Retailer Fruit and Vegetable Education: Training Kit. IATP thanks H. Brooks and Company for their support in preparing this material.

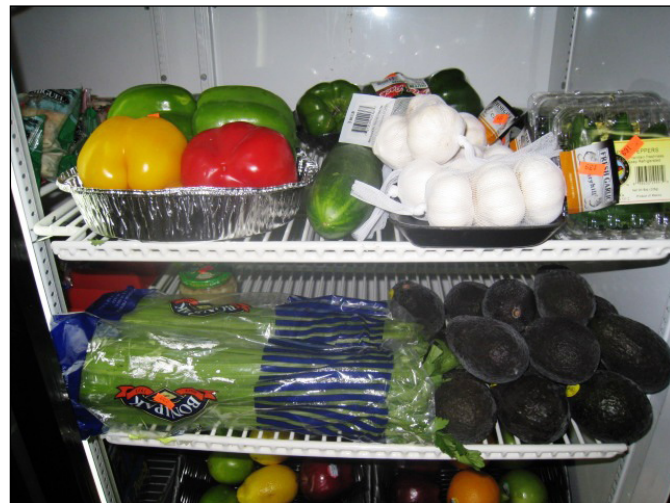
Storage temperature and shelf life

Different produce items require different storage temperatures to maintain freshness. Keep the following storage chart in mind when selecting produce items.

Group A (32–35°F)		Shelf Life (days)
Fruit		
Apples		14
Avocados (ripe)		2–3
Cantaloupe		7
Grapes		7
Kiwifruit		10
Strawberries		5
Vegetables		
Asparagus		7
Broccoli		7
Cabbage		14
Carrots		14
Cauliflower		7
Celery		10
Collard Greens		7
Corn		6
Kale		7
Lettuce		7
Mushrooms		7
Spinach		7

Group B (45–50°F)		Shelf Life (days)
Fruit		
Avocado (unripe)		10
Grapefruit		12
Lemons/Limes		10
Mango		7
Oranges		10
Pineapple		10
Vegetables		
Bell Peppers		7
Eggplant		3–4
Green Beans		7
Okra		7
Yellow Squash		7
Zucchini		7

Group C (55–64°F, or an air-conditioned room)		Shelf Life (days)
Fruit		
Bananas		Up to 10
Papaya		4
Watermelon		10
Vegetables		
Acorn Squash		14
Butternut Squash		14
Onions		30
Sweet Potatoes		14
Tomatoes		10



Proper storage means better quality

For more information, please visit www.iatp.org/localfoods.



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