

HARVESTING AND HANDLING PRODUCE SAFELY



HARVEST PRODUCE AT THE RIGHT TIME

If possible, pick produce in the morning for morning or early afternoon distribution. This reduces the amount of time you have to store the produce.

HANDLE PRODUCE GENTLY

Bruises, nicks, and cuts all cause the produce to spoil faster. When picking, place items gently into the bucket or box. Don't throw or drop produce. Consider packing produce in boxes in the field to reduce handling injury.

WASH PRODUCE ONLY IF NEEDED

If the produce is really dirty, consider giving it a rinse with potable water (from a municipal or tested supply). After rinsing, set the produce out on screened tables in a shaded or covered area to drip dry. Produce should only come into contact with disinfected surfaces (no wood). AVOID washing tomatoes, cabbage, okra, summer squash, berries, and peas. The extra moisture can promote spoilage.

KEEP PRODUCE COOL

After picking and possibly washing, keep produce in some type of refrigeration unit set between 32 and 40 degrees F. If that is not possible, keep produce in the shade or a cool room until it can be transported. Some items including green beans, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, peppers, potatoes, summer squash, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and watermelons can handle warmer temperatures (ideal storage temps between approximately 40 and 50 degrees). These items can tolerate more time outside of the refrigerator, especially if they will be distributed quickly.

USE CLEAN AND DRY BAGS, BOXES, OR BINS FOR TRANSPORTING

Avoid reusing plastic bags that are dirty. Cardboard boxes or plastic bins should also be clean. Make sure that boxes are free from any sharp objects.

WASH AND DISINFECT HARVEST BINS, BUCKETS...

... or anything that comes into contact with produce frequently. Dirt and grime can transfer bacteria from produce to people. Use water (hot water if available), soap, a disinfectant (dilute household bleach to 50 ppm or 1.5 tablespoons per 5 gallons of water), and a good brush to keep containers and surfaces clean. To help keep harvest bins clean, avoid setting them on bare soil and stacking them when they are dirty.

Companies, organizations, farmers, and gardeners who donate food to a food pantry are protected from criminal and civil liability by the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. In brief, the law protects donors from liability if the product is donated in good faith and later causes harm to the recipient. You can read about the details here: <http://bit.ly/fooddonationact>.

In addition, donations may be tax deductible or in some cases be eligible for a tax credit. People are encouraged to speak with a tax professional. Information about the Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credit (FPT) is available at: <http://dor.mo.gov/taxcredit/fpt.php>.