Dear Alice,

I know how important it is to get plenty of fruits and vegetables in one's diet, but I've been finding it difficult ever since I moved out to do so. I live by myself, on a fixed income, and I can only grocery shop once a week. Whenever I buy fruits and vegetables, they end up going bad three or four days after I buy them, and I feel like I've wasted them. Do you have any advice on cheap, vitamin-rich fruits or vegetables that keep for a good long time? Thanks!

Berry Healthy

Answer

Dear Berry Healthy,

Eating healthily on a budget, when you can only get to the grocery store once a week, can be tricky. But fruits and veggies don't have to break the bank or spoil on the shelf before you can take advantage of their nutrients! There's a combination of strategies that can help. Buying fruits and vegetables that are low cost and nutritious combined with smart shopping habits, strategic meal planning, and effective storage can prevent waste. Here are some tips on how to more easily incorporate the good stuff into your diet and budget?

Before you go to the store:

- Consider your options for shopping since a larger grocery store may have more options and lower costs than a nearby convenience store.
- Use coupons and monitor ads for what's on sale.
- Know what's in season to ensure freshness.
- Have a snack since it's easier to stick to a budget at the grocery store on a full stomach.

At the store:

- Look for things that are on sale and buy in bulk to cut prices.
- Don't buy single servings or pre-cut product, as this can cost much more than whole fruits and vegetables.
- Try hardy fruits like apples, bananas, pears, nectarines, and watermelon.
- Look for lasting vegetables like carrots, spinach, broccoli, collards, mustard greens, kale, potatoes, cabbage, and onions.
- Try frozen, especially for berries.
Canned fruits and vegetables will last a long time, but choose those with no added salt or sugar.

At home:

- Plan your meals to use up your purchases in a given week.
- Cook enough for multiple meals and freeze the leftovers.
- Fruit that is about to turn or purchased in bulk can be cut and frozen for smoothies or baking.
- Veggies on the way out can be frozen or made into soup.
- Store produce appropriately.

List adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [2].

This last point on prolonging the shelf life of produce varies wildly from item to item. Some veggies like to be damp (such as broccoli, dark leafy greens, and carrots), while others don’t like to get wet (onions). Some prefer the fridge (spinach), while others just need a cool, dry place (potatoes, winter squash). Remove or loosen any bands or twist ties from greens to let them breathe, and remove greens from items like turnips, radishes, and beets, as they draw moisture from the roots. Most fruits do well in a cool place on the counter, and shouldn’t be washed until you’re going to eat them, as added moisture encourages mold. You can ask your local grocer or take a look at how produce are presented in the store to get an idea of how produce like their environment.

Hope these tips gave you some berry good ideas!

Alice!

Category:
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Food Choices & Health [4]
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Resources

get balanced! Guide for Healthier Eating (Morningside) [12]
Published date:
Apr 12, 2013
Last reviewed on:
Nov 06, 2014