

HARVEST OF THE MONTH

RED GRAPEFRUIT

JANUARY

The Texas red grapefruit is a tangy-tasting citrus fruit that grows in three different varieties — Rio Star, Ruby Sweet and Flame. All varieties are in supermarkets from October through May.



STORAGE

- Store grapefruit at room temperature and use within a few days.
- Do not store grapefruit inside a plastic bag or closed container. Air will not circulate well and can cause the fruit to get moldy and spoil early.
- To keep for four to six weeks, store at above refrigerated temperature and below room temperature (45-50°F) with 85-95% relative humidity.



BENEFITS

The Texas red grapefruit is high in vitamins A and C, which means eating a Texas red grapefruit or drinking its juice, is good for the eyes and skin, and strengthens the body's immune system against colds, the flu and other viruses.

Talking to Students about Vitamin C

Vitamin C supports maintenance of collagen, protects against infection and helps in iron absorption.



SELECTION

- Texas red grapefruits do not continue to ripen once harvested, so it is best to choose those that are firm, smooth-skinned, shiny and brightly colored specimens.
- Avoid fruits with soft spots, bruises and discolored skins.
- Heavy, thinner-skinned citrus fruits tend to be juicier than light, thick-skinned fruits.
- A very rough peel is often thick and a strong indication that the underlying fruit may be small and dry.
- Visible surface defects such as scars, scratches and discoloration do not affect flavor.



PREPARATION

- Like other citrus fruits, the Texas red grapefruit does not require much preparation before being eaten, other than being peeled, sliced in half or divided into several slices. It is recommended to wash the fruit under cool running water even before it is peeled.
- The Texas red grapefruit can also be strained for its juice or broiled.



TASTING TIP

Share a fun fact with children when sampling new food items.



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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

RED LEAF LETTUCE

FEBRUARY

Red leaf lettuce has a mild, crispy texture and is often used in salads. Its color is either red or reddish-purple. This vegetable comes in several varieties, including New Red Fire lettuce, Red Sails lettuce, Redina lettuce, Galactic lettuce and Benito lettuce.



STORAGE



- Store lettuce ideally as close to 32 °F as possible with a relative humidity of 98-100% and some air circulation. Lettuce stored at refrigeration temperatures closer to 41 °F and below has an approximate shelf life of 5 days.
- Store, hold and serve lettuce at 41 °F degrees or below at all times. Do not allow direct contact with ice at any time during storing, handling or serving.
- Do not freeze lettuce. Do not store lettuce in dry storage areas.
- Store lettuce in air tight containers for maximum shelf life.
- Store lettuce away from ethylene gas producing items such as apples, grapes and berries because lettuce is extremely sensitive to ethylene and will develop russet spotting and soft rot within 24 hours.
- Use lettuce as soon as possible because it is a very perishable product. Avoid using leafy greens with visible signs of decay or damage. Remove unusable portions or discard entire head.



BENEFITS

Red leaf lettuce is low in sodium and calories, and generally healthier to eat than green lettuce, providing a lot of vitamin A, vitamin K and potassium.

Talking to Students about Vitamin A

Vitamin A has many functions, the most notable being its role in maintaining good vision.



SELECTION

- When selecting red leaf lettuce for meal preparation, choose a head that has vibrant colors, no black or brown spots, and healthy-looking leaves.



PREPARATION

- Chop off the red leaf lettuce stalk's flat end and throw the end away. Remove and discard the outer two leaves and any damaged or wilted leaves. Just prior to serving, wash lettuce under cold running water. Do not immerse or allow to soak in water. Place clean leaves on a layer of paper towels to dry. USDA recommends not washing lettuce that has been labeled pre-washed.



TASTING TIP

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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

BUTTON MUSH-ROOMS

MARCH

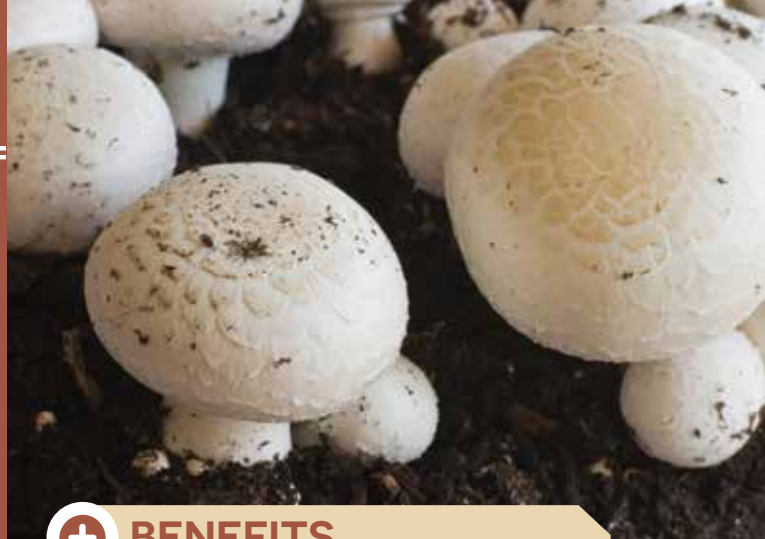
Button mushrooms are a fairly popular, low-calorie food eaten raw or cooked, and frequently added as part of a larger meal.



STORAGE



- If you want to keep mushrooms for more than a couple days, wrap them in paper towels and put them in a perforated plastic bag.
- If you do not have perforated plastic bags, put them in a bowl on a paper towel and cover the bowl with plastic wrap that you've punctured holes in.
- The goal is to keep the mushrooms' natural moisture in and keep the excess moisture out.
- Store in the refrigerator at 32-36°F, 90-98% relative humidity.



+ BENEFITS

Mushrooms are low in calories, fat-free, cholesterol-free and low in sodium, while providing key nutrients, including selenium, potassium, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin D and more.

Talking to Students about Vitamin D

Vitamin D works with calcium and phosphorus to keep bones strong.

✓ SELECTION

- Look for mushrooms with a fresh, smooth appearance, free from major blemishes, with a dry (not dried) surface.
- A closed veil (the thin membrane under the cap) indicates a delicate flavor; an open veil means a richer flavor.



PREPARATION

- Gently wipe mushrooms with a damp cloth or soft brush to remove particles. Or, rinse quickly with cold water; immediately pat dry with paper towels.
- Never soak mushrooms; they are porous and absorb water.
- There is no need to peel mushrooms. The only trimming they may need is the stem end, if it's dry.

🔪 TASTING TIP

Try offering children one new food at a time.



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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

BROCCOLI

APRIL

Broccoli belongs to the Cruciferae family, which also includes cauliflower, cabbage, bok choy and Brussels sprouts. The vegetable family name comes from the shape of the flowers, whose four petals resemble a cross.



STORAGE



- To achieve maximum shelf life, store at 32°F with 95% relative humidity. These conditions will help broccoli last for up to four weeks.
- Broccoli stored at 39-41°F will have an approximate shelf life of 5 days.
- Do not store broccoli in dry storage.
- To store, mist the broccoli heads, wrap loosely in damp paper towels and refrigerate. Use within 2 to 3 days.
- Do not store broccoli in a sealed plastic bag.
- Raw broccoli needs air and a perforated plastic bag is recommended.
- Cooked broccoli should be covered and refrigerated. Use within 3 days.



BENEFITS

Broccoli is a great source of vitamin K, vitamin C and folate. It is also a very good source of dietary fiber, pantothenic acid, vitamin B6, manganese, phosphorus, vitamin A and potassium.

Talking to Students about Vitamin K

Vitamin K is necessary for the synthesis of proteins involved in blood clotting and for regulating blood calcium levels.



SELECTION

- Although readily available year-round, the prime time for fresh broccoli is October through April.
- When selecting broccoli, look for lively green leaves and firm, thin stalks.
- Thick stalks will be woody and indicate aging.



PREPARATION

- Broccoli can be eaten raw, but blanching it quickly in boiling water can give it a more crisp-tender texture and enhance its flavor.
- Broccoli can also be boiled, steamed, sautéed or roasted.



TASTING TIP

Avoid forcing children to try new foods.



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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

BLUE-BERRY

MAY

Blueberries are plump, juicy and sweet berries that grow on bell-shaped, white, pale pink or red flowers. They are pale greenish at first, then reddish-purple, and finally, dark purple when ripe.



STORAGE

- Store in a single layer at 32-36°F, 90-98% relative humidity.
- Blueberries should be stored soon after purchase in a sealed air-tight container to keep out moisture and other contaminants.
- Do not rinse your blueberries until immediately before use. This is a vital part of extending the shelf life of blueberries.



BENEFITS

Blueberries are a very good source of vitamin K, vitamin C and manganese. Blueberries are also a good source of fiber and copper.

Talking to Students about Fiber

Fiber is a carbohydrate that promotes digestive health.



SELECTION

- When purchasing blueberries, select those that are firm, plump, "dusty" blue in color and uniform in size.



PREPARATION

- Fresh berries are fragile and should be washed carefully and then gently patted dry if they are not organic.
- Wash berries just prior to use to not prematurely remove the protective bloom visible on the skin's surface.
- When using frozen berries in recipes that do not require cooking, thaw well and drain prior to using.
- Blueberries retain their maximum amount of nutrients and their maximum taste when they are enjoyed fresh and not prepared in a cooked recipe. That is because their nutrients suffer damage when exposed to temperatures (350°F/175°C and higher) used in baking.



TASTING TIP

Let children choose which new foods to try.



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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

PEACH

JUNE

Peaches are stone fruits. Stone fruits have large pits in their centers. Peaches are known by their yellow and red fuzzy skins. Peaches grow at their best from June through the end of August.

STORAGE

- Peaches last around four days, possibly longer if you refrigerate them in a plastic bag.
- Do not wash peaches until ready to use.



BENEFITS

Peaches are a rich provider of vitamin A, beta-carotene, and vitamin C. The peach's nutrients help maintain vision, a healthy nervous system, and healthy skin, bones and teeth.

Talking to Students about Vitamin A

Vitamin A has many functions, the most notable being its role in maintaining good vision.

SELECTION

- A ripe peach will have a pleasingly sweet fragrance.
- Look for a creamy gold to yellow under color.
- The red or "blush" of a peach is an indication of variety, not ripeness.
- Peaches should be soft to the touch but not mushy.
- Don't squeeze peaches; they bruise easily.

PREPARATION

- Wash peaches before eating or using them.
- To remove the stone, cut into the peach near the top until the tip of the knife hits the stone, then cut lengthwise around the stone.
- Gently hold both halves of the peach and twist in opposite directions to pull it apart.
- Put one side down and then loosen the stone from the peach flesh with a knife or your finger.

TASTING TIP

Continue offering a variety of new foods for children to try.



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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

CHERRY TOMATO

JULY

Cherry tomatoes are a small, bite-sized variety of tomatoes. Most are red, but some are yellow, green or black.



STORAGE

- Store ripe cherry or grape tomatoes at 45 to 60° F with a relative humidity of 95%. These are ideal conditions and tomatoes will be acceptable for up to 10 days. Tomatoes stored at refrigeration temperatures below 41° F will have approximate shelf life of 5 days. Tomatoes stored at temperatures lower than 75° F will have approximate shelf life of 1 to 2 days. Storing tomatoes above 75° F is not recommended.
- Store fresh ripe tomatoes in a cool, dark place, stem-side down and use within a few days.
- Refrigeration nullifies flavor and turns the tomato flesh mealy. If you must refrigerate, take the tomatoes out about 30 minutes before using them to return them to room temperature.
- Store tomatoes away from ethylene gas sensitive produce such as lettuce and other leafy greens. Tomatoes are ethylene producers and may cause damage and reduce shelf life.



BENEFITS

Cherry tomatoes are a very good source of vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin K, potassium and manganese. Cherry tomatoes also contain lycopene, an antioxidant that may lower the risk of certain diseases caused by cellular damage.

Talking to Students about Lycopene

Lycopene is a bright red pigment that acts as an antioxidant in the body.



SELECTION

- When selecting tomatoes at the market, use your nose. Smell the blossom (not stem) end. The most flavorful ones will have a rich aroma.
- The skin should be taut and not shriveled.



PREPARATION

- Wash tomatoes under running water that is 10 degrees warmer than the tomatoes to prevent infusion of potential bacterial contaminants.
- Due to their size, cherry tomatoes are better for salads and various cooked dishes, rather than as a dressing for sandwiches.
- Cherry tomatoes can be squashed, pickled, sauced or blended into various hot or cold soups.



TASTING TIP

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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

RED AND YELLOW BELL PEPPER

AUGUST

Red bell peppers could be called the full-grown bell peppers, because they are picked later than other bell peppers. They often have a sweet taste. Yellow peppers are picked in the middle of their growing time and rank between green and red bell peppers on how ripe they become. Yellow bell peppers lack the sour taste green peppers sometimes have.



STORAGE



- Store peppers in the coolest part of a storeroom or warmest part of a refrigerator.
- Store red and green bell peppers in the vegetable crisper of the refrigerator.
- Typical shelf life is 8 to 10 days.
- Green bell peppers will usually stay fresh longer than orange or red peppers.
- Store peppers away from ethylene producing fruits, such as apples, bananas and pears.
- Store peppers away from foods that absorb odors.
- To freeze: slice or chop peppers, spread in a single layer on cookie tray and freeze, then promptly place in airtight containers or heavy-duty freezer bags and return to freezer.
- Foods kept constantly frozen at 0° F will keep safely indefinitely.



BENEFITS

Bell peppers are an excellent source of vitamin A (in the form of carotenoids), vitamin C and vitamin K, vitamin B6 and dietary fiber. They are also a good source of folate, niacin, thiamin and magnesium.

Talking to Students about Vitamin B6

Vitamin B6 supports normal nervous system function and brain development.



SELECTION

- Choose firm, brightly colored peppers with tight skin that seem heavy for their size.
- Avoid dull, shriveled or pitted peppers.



PREPARATION

- First, wash and dry bell peppers.
- Then, remove the stem by cutting around it in a circle. This gets rid of most of the seeds.
- When you look inside, you'll see the white "ribs;" slice down the ribs, so that you have three or four pieces of pepper.
- Do not soak peppers.



TASTING TIP

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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

WATER- MELONS

SEPTEMBER

Watermelon has a smooth hard rind, usually green with dark green stripes or yellow spots. It also has a juicy, sweet inside that is deep red to pink, but sometimes orange, yellow, or white, with many seeds. Seedless watermelons are also available.



STORAGE

- Watermelon stored at 50-60 °F with a relative humidity of 90% will be acceptable for up to 3 weeks.
- Watermelons held in dry storage below 75 °F will have approximate shelf life of up to 10 days. If dry storage temperatures are above 75 °F, shelf life will decline to 5 days.
- At temperatures between 32 and 45 °F, watermelons are subject to chilling injury that may result in pitting, off-flavors, and color loss.
- Watermelons may become mushy and shelf life may be reduced when exposed to ethylene gas-producing fruit such as apples, stone fruits, and grapes.
- Store watermelons at 41 °F or below for up to 24 hours prior to cutting to reduce the amount of time it takes cut melon to cool to 41 °F.
- Whole melons with visible signs of decay or damaged rinds (such as mechanical damage or cracking) have an increased risk of containing harmful bacteria.
- Cover, date, and refrigerate cut watermelon. Use by the following day for best quality.
- Hold and serve watermelon at 41 °F. Do not store cut watermelon at room temperature. If possible, display cut melons in a refrigerated case, not just on top of ice. Take and record serving line temperatures.
 - Discard cut watermelon after 2 hours in the temperature danger zone (41 °F to 135 °F).



BENEFITS

Watermelons are mostly water — about 92% — and are a very good source of vitamin A and vitamin C. Watermelons also contain a high level of lycopene, which helps to protect against heart disease and cancer.

Talking to Students about Vitamin C

Vitamin C supports maintenance of collagen, protects against infection and helps in iron absorption.



SELECTION

- Make sure the watermelon is firm, symmetrical and free of severe bruises.
- Some minor scratches are okay — the purpose of the melon's thick rind is to protect the contents inside.
- Ripe watermelons should also be dark green in color.
- A healthy, ripe watermelon should be fairly heavy for its size.
- Turn your watermelon over and note whether the bottom has a yellowish spot (also called "the ground spot"). This is where the watermelon sat on the ground while sitting in the sun at the farm. If this spot is white or greenish, your watermelon may have been picked too soon and might not be as ripe as it should be.



PREPARATION

- Wash the outer surface of the watermelon thoroughly under cool, running tap water. Scrub melons with a clean produce brush before cutting. Cut away any bruised or damaged areas before serving.



TASTING TIP

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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

GALA APPLES

OCTOBER

Gala apples have stripes and are orange in color. They are sweet and not too tart, which makes them a popular snack. They rank No. 2 out of the Top 10 apples grown in the United States.



STORAGE

- Apples are best stored at 32 °F with a relative humidity of 90% and some air circulation. Under these conditions, apples are acceptable for up to 3 months. Apples stored at general refrigeration temperatures below 41 °F will have approximate shelf life of up to 20 days.
- Apples may be held in dry storage for up to 7 days.
- Apples will pick up odors if stored with certain foods that produce them, especially onions and potatoes.
- Apples produce ethylene. Store apples away from ethylene sensitive products such as bananas, broccoli, carrots, cucumbers, leafy greens, lettuce and sweet potatoes.
- A perforated plastic bag works best, as it allows some of the moisture to escape while keeping the apples crisp.



BENEFITS

Gala apples are a significant source of antioxidants, which may help lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer. They are a good source of vitamin C and dietary fiber. Gala apples possess pectin — a natural fiber — which has been shown to reduce cholesterol and help prevent heart disease.

Talking to Students about Fiber

Fiber is a carbohydrate that promotes digestive health.



SELECTION

- Select Gala apples that are smooth-skinned, deeply colored and glossy.
- When ripe, Galas will be golden yellow with slightly pinkish orange stripes.
- Waxing is a normal part of apple processing and is not a food safety concern.



PREPARATION

- Wash apples under cold, running water prior to serving.
- Rinse and dry Gala apples before eating or using them as a cooking ingredient.
- Like other apples, Gala apples can be eaten plain, made into sauce or jelly, or they can be included in salads, meat dishes, pies and desserts.
- Dip or coat sliced apples with an acidic solution of 1 part lemon juice to 3 parts water or use an appropriate commercial product according to the manufacturer's instructions to prevent browning in apples cut on-site.



TASTING TIP

Avoid forcing children to try new foods.



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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

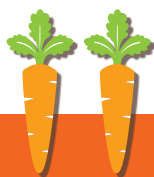
CARROT

NOVEMBER

Carrots are root vegetables like potatoes, turnips and beets. The roots of these vegetables are edible.



STORAGE



- Store carrots ideally at 32 °F with a relative humidity of 90-95% and some air circulation. Under these conditions, carrots will be acceptable for about 4 weeks.
- Carrots stored at general refrigeration temperatures below 41 °F in sealed bags have approximate shelf life of 10 days.
- Carrots may be stored in dry storage below 75 °F for up to 4 days.
- Remove green tops to carrots prior to storage to increase shelf life because the tops will use water and drain nutritional value from the carrot.
- Cut off carrot greens, place carrots in a container with a lid and cover completely with water.
- Keep the container in the refrigerator, changing the water every four to five days.
- Store carrots away from ethylene-producing fruits and vegetables, because ethylene causes a bitter flavor in carrots.



BENEFITS

Carrots are rich in vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin K, potassium and dietary fiber. They also are a good source of antioxidants. The health benefits of carrots are many, including helping to reduce cholesterol, preventing heart disease, protecting against development of certain cancers, improving vision, and reducing the signs of premature aging.

Talking to Students about Potassium

Potassium is a mineral that has many functions, including maintaining heart health.



SELECTION

- Choose carrots with a good, smooth form and a hearty orange color.
- Select carrots that still have greens attached, as these tend to keep better and taste fresher. The leaves themselves should be fresh and bright green.
- Note the carrot's shape: Try to choose medium-sized carrots that taper off at the end. Medium-sized carrots will be the easiest to cook. Thick carrots are often tough and harder to cook with.
- Select young carrots for the most sweetness. Slim, early carrots are the sweetest.



PREPARATION

- Wash carrot roots and gently scrub them with a vegetable brush right before eating.
- To remove additional debris, gently scrape the skin using a knife.
- If the stem end is green, it should be cut away as it will be bitter.
- Depending upon the recipe or your personal preference, carrots can be left whole or julienned, grated, shredded or sliced into sticks or rounds.
- While heating can often damage some of the delicate phytonutrients in vegetables, the beta-carotene as found in carrots has been shown to be surprisingly heat-stable.



TASTING TIP

Let children choose which new foods to try.



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HARVEST OF THE MONTH

SPINACH

DECEMBER

Spinach is a leaf vegetable, also called potherb, vegetable green, leafy green and salad green.



STORAGE

- Store immediately in the coldest part of the refrigerator.
- Fresh spinach should be stored loosely packed in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator crisper, where it will keep for about 4 days.
- Cooked spinach does not store too well, certainly no longer than one day in the refrigerator.



BENEFITS

Spinach is a very good source of vitamin K, vitamin A (in the form of carotenoids), manganese, folate, vitamin B6, vitamin E and vitamin C. It's also a very good source of dietary fiber, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, calcium and iron.

Talking to Students about Vitamin B6

Vitamin B6 supports normal nervous system function and brain development.



SELECTION

- Spinach leaves should be a vibrant, deep green.
- Spinach that has yellowed or grown wilted or slimy should never be eaten.
- Do not wash spinach before storing in the refrigerator — because it will rot very quickly!
- Instead, wrap bundles of leaves in a paper towel, and then place in a tight plastic bag.



PREPARATION

- Spinach stems are fibrous, stringy and difficult to eat, especially after cooking. Remove the stems before washing.
- Rinse each leaf of spinach, lift into a colander and let drain. Repeat until all dirt is removed.



TASTING TIP

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