



## Use crispers to store, separate produce

**I'm never really sure how to use the humidity controls on my refrigerator's fruit and vegetable crispers. Any advice?**

Not all refrigerators have controls on those crispers, so you're lucky to have them. Basically, fruit and vegetable crispers are designed to maintain a higher humidity than the rest of the refrigerator, so your fresh produce lasts longer. But different types of produce have different needs. That's why some refrigerators offer consumers the ability to control the humidity levels by increasing or decreasing the air flow permitted into the bins. Less air flow means higher humidity.

Leafy greens tend to fare best with higher humidity and the coolest conditions. Lettuce, spinach, collard greens, and even green onions belong in this group.

Apples, grapes, bell peppers, summer squash and other thin-skinned fruits and vegetables tend to like slightly less-humid conditions than leafy greens.

Citrus fruit prefers even less moisture — you can store oranges, lemons and grapefruit in a basket outside of the crispers, if you have room.

Besides controlling humidity, crispers also offer the opportunity to separate foods that just don't play well together. For example, some fruits continue to ripen after harvest. When they do so, they release ethylene gas, and that can affect other produce

stored nearby. Apples, pears, plums, cantaloupes and peaches all are high-ethylene producers. The gas can cause green vegetables to turn yellow; lettuce to be marred with rust-colored spots; asparagus spears to toughen; potatoes to sprout; and carrots to turn bitter. The best advice is to store such fruits away from other produce.

Some fruits and vegetables do best outside of the refrigerator. Tomatoes can lose flavor, and even become overly soft, if kept too cold, so keep them on the counter instead. Experts differ on cucumbers. Although cucumbers purchased at most grocery stores have a protective wax coating, they are best stored at temperatures above 40 degrees and below 60 degrees. Store them too long in the refrigerator, and they become mealy. Just eat them quickly, and you won't have a problem.

Some other produce storage tips:

- If you refrigerate bananas, they'll stop ripening and their skins will turn black. Keep them on the counter unless they're becoming too soft.

- Potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions and dry garlic prefer cool, dry conditions, so keep them out of humid crispers. They actually don't need to be refrigerated at all.

- Cauliflower likes high humidity. You can wrap it in a damp paper towel to maintain moisture.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**Editor:**

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