

How to Select the Best Fresh Fruit at the Grocery Store

This list will help you pick out the best quality fruit during the peak of its season. Print it out and keep it by your grocery list or save a copy to your phone so you have it handy when shopping.

Apples: Select apples that are richly colored, firm, shiny, and don't have bruises, or soft brown spots. Smell the apples to see which variety you like. Fuji is a good all around eating and cooking apple that is often on sale or priced low. Red Delicious bruises more easily than other apples. Granny Smith is generally more tart. Honeycrisp can have excellent flavor but tend to be expensive. Apples come ripe in the fall and are stored professionally to be sold all year. Signs will say "new crop" when the fall crop is in. September-November is peak season for apples in the US.

Avocados (Technically a fruit and specifically single-seeded berry): Never take home avocados that are rock hard and bright green – these often won't ripen. If you remove the stem of an avocado and it is even, light green beneath then it is ready to eat. When an avocado is ripe it will yield to gentle, even pressure. Squeeze it lightly in the palm of your hand without using your fingertips to see if it is ready to eat. Avocados can be bought and ripened for a few days before eating if they are not quite ready. Store avocados on the counter with bananas or apples to get them to ripen more quickly. Avocados have more potassium than bananas and are a high protein fruit. In the US, March is peak season for avocados. Note: Eating avocado pits is trendy but not recommended. Do your own research before eating them.

Bananas: Select fruits that have no brown spots or bruising. Make sure to check the bottoms for bruises. Choose fruit that is light green to full yellow. Light green bananas can be ripened on the counter or placed in a closed paper bag to speed ripening. Placing the fruit in the refrigerator after it is fully ripe will help it stay good longer. The skins will turn brown but the fruit will still be good. March is the peak of the banana season in the US.

Berries (Blackberries, Blueberries, Raspberries, Strawberries): Berries should always smell good, be dry, firm, and not overly soft. Examine boxes for any visible mold or crushed berries and avoid those containers. It is natural for blueberries to have a white sheen. Strawberries should be uniformly red. Buy seasonally from local vendors for best flavor. May-July is peak berry season in the US.

Cantaloupe and Honeydew Type Melons: If these have no smell, beware! The more green the melon the less ripe it is. As these melons ripen they get a yellow tinge to the skin. A good melon should be heavy, firm and extremely fragrant. If the melon has cracks, brown spots, or mushy spots avoid it. This is a good fruit to buy locally and in season when possible. May-September is peak season for these melons in the US.

Citrus (Grapefruits, Oranges, Tangerines, Lemons, Limes): In the US, citrus fruits are in season during the winter and early spring months. This is when you will get the best price and flavor. Fruits should be heavy for their size and fragrant. Choose fruits that have a smooth, soft, supple skin. Avoid fruits that have very thick rinds or that are at all shriveled. Oranges with some green on them are fine if they smell good. Sometimes when oranges are fully orange they have been dyed or placed in an orange mesh bag to look more orange. Smell is a better indicator than color. Watch for Meyer Lemons that usually have a short season in late winter. They are extra sweet and juicy with a unique flavor. Also keep an eye out for the Cara Cara orange. This sweet, pink-fleshed navel orange is a real treat!

Cherries (technically a stone fruit): Select fruit that is soft, plump and fragrant. Purple varieties like Bing should be rich purple in color. White varieties such as Queen Ann should have a deep pink or red blush. Cherries with the stems attached will have a longer shelf life. Examine cherries for visible mold and don't buy bags of fruit with any moldy ones in the bag. June is peak season for cherries in the US. Store cherries in the refrigerator.

Grapes: Select grapes that are firm, plump, attached to the vine and not shriveled or moldy. Generally it is considered ok to taste one in the store before you decide to buy. Store grapes in the refrigerator or remove from stem and freeze for a summer treat. June-September is peak season for grapes in the US.

Kiwi: A ripe kiwi has a light green or almost yellow color in the skin. It should be firm but not rock hard and not mushy. Choose a fruit that gives slightly when pressed. Peak season for green kiwi is November-March in the US. Golden Kiwi is at peak season in June-August in the US and looks golden when ripe.

Mangos: A mango should smell amazing and be slightly soft to the touch but not mushy or rock hard. Mangos that are mostly green should be avoided. Look for fruit that has a bright red blush over yellow skin or for the yellow variety mangos that are pure yellow with no green. Mangos will ripen some on the counter and should be eaten just before the skin starts to shrivel. April is peak season for mangos in the US.

Pears: Unless you buy locally, pears are usually picked quite green. Choose fruits that are not bruised. Look for pears that are a little less firm around the stem. These should ripen nicely on the counter at home. Ripening can be speeded up by placing them in a paper bag at room temperature. The pear season runs from July-December in the US. Different varieties come ripe in different months.

Pineapple: Avoid fruit that has mold at one end or mushy brown spots. Look for fruit that smells good, has an even pattern, and where the leaves look the freshest. Consider buying a pineapple corer and slicer if you buy pineapple frequently. June and July are peak season in the US for pineapple.

Pomegranate: Select heavy, fruit with smooth skin. It is ok to select cracked fruit if there is no mold and you are going to eat it right away. Avoid buying shriveled fruit but if the fruit shrivels on the counter at home it can still be wonderfully sweet and delicious. Pomegranates can hold for a long time on your counter. My preferred method of opening a pomegranate is to score the fruit in half and turn the skin inside out while I dump the sections into a bowl of water. I remove the seeds from the white pith in the water. Seeds go to the bottom and the pith floats on the top and can be skimmed off. Drain and eat. September-November is peak season for pomegranates in the US.

Stone Fruit (Apricots, Nectarines, Peaches, Plums): Select fruits that are as soft and fragrant as possible. Fruit should not be mushy or rock hard. This is a fruit you should try to buy seasonally from local vendors for best flavor. Stone fruits are in season from May-Sept in the US. The season starts with apricots, moves to peaches and then adds plums through the early fall.

Watermelon: Select melons that are firm and sound hollow when you thump the underside with your hand. Melons that sound dull are under or over ripe. Watermelon that has been ripened in the field will have a yellow spot on one side. Choose a melon where that spot is a creamy yellow. Avoid melons that have split - they are mushy and going bad. Watermelon should be bought ripe and served chilled right away. Cut it as needed, not all at once. Store in the refrigerator. May-August is peak season for melons in the US.