

Caring for Your CSA Share: Don't Let Those Veggies Rot!



Joining a CSA has so many wonderful advantages. In addition to getting the freshest, high quality produce available, and supporting your local farmer, you also learn to eat seasonally. Often throughout the season you will find yourself with a seemingly endless supply of one or two vegetables for a few weeks only for those items to vanish the next. This is one of the joys and frustrations of eating in sync with nature. It does, however teach us to appreciate each vegetable as their time appears.

To get the most out of your share with minimal waste, it is important to know how to properly store and preserve the bounty when it arrives. My first advice is to learn as many new recipes as you can and get creative. You'll have no choice when you're up to your eyeballs in lettuce and cucumbers and squash at the peak of season. But you can't eat it all at once, so here are some practical tips on how to care for your share.

Let's begin with the most perishable items and work our way to the least perishable.

Eat Now!

This category of veggies should be eaten right away. They don't store well under any condition and lose flavor the longer you wait. The day you get it, make sure it ends up on your menu or in the freezer!

Veggies: Corn, fava beans

Preserving: Corn may be cut off the cob and frozen immediately after bringing home. Fava beans can be removed from their outer "jackets" and frozen as well.

Eat Quick

Veggies: Salad greens, arugula, spinach, lettuce, collards, kale, bok choy, Swiss chard, and herbs

Storage tips:

- When you return home from the CSA immediately pull apart lettuce and other greens, wash in a sink full of water, and place on clean towels on the countertop to air dry.
- All greens should be stored in ziplock plastic bags wrapped in dry paper towels to absorb the excess moisture. Excess moisture causes rotting.
- Make sure your greens and the bag they are stored in are dry. Wipe the leaves if they are wet and place a paper towel in the bag to absorb moisture.
- Cover the entire veggie or exposed leaves will shrivel up
- Never store greens in the same drawer as fruits since fruits release ethylene gas that triggers deterioration in veggies
- Herbs should be placed in a cup of water in the refrigerator, or wrapped in towels in a plastic bag UNWASHED

Preservation: There is really no way to preserve salad greens or lettuce so they have to be eaten or shared. Swiss chard stems may be pickled. Herbs may be chopped and frozen covered in oil in an ice cube tray.

Eat Soon but keep it Cool

These veggies are a bit heartier and last several days to one week when refrigerated.

Veggies: Cucumbers, peppers, summer squash, asparagus, fennel, cauliflower, broccoli, brussel sprouts, celery, garlic scapes, celtuse, green beans, sugar snap, or snow peas

Storage tip:

- Place in dry plastic bags loosely sealed.

Preserving: cucumbers, peppers, fennel, green beans, and garlic scapes may all be pickled.

Eat Soon but leave in your Room

These veggies are best kept at room temperature. Refrigerating will ruin flavor and speed mushiness

Veggies: Tomatoes, Eggplant, Tomatillos

Storage tips:

- Keep these goodies in a basket at room temperature. They will last several days depending on ripeness.
- Eat your overripe tomatoes first, under-ripe tomatoes will mature left on a kitchen counter.
- Store tomatoes separate from onions and potatoes

Preserving: Make tomato sauce or skin and puree tomatoes and freeze. Dairy-free baba ganoush freezes well.

Take Your Time

Root veggies can stay fresh for up to two weeks when properly stored.

Veggies: Beets, carrots, radishes, kohlrabi, celery root, rutabaga, parsnips, turnips

Storage tips:

- Removing greens from roots will prolong its life and prevent rotting
- A cool dry storage spot will keep roots for over a week or
- Store in sealed plastic bags in the fridge in summer

Preserving: beets, radishes, kohlrabi, turnips all are fantastic pickled

Store It

These are generally late season veggies that are meant to be stored for several weeks to be available over the winter months.

Veggies: Potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash, onions, garlic, pumpkin, cabbage

Storage tips:

- With the exception of cabbage, these veggies are best kept in a cool, well ventilated area, out of direct sunlight.

- Cabbage should be refrigerated in a loose plastic bag, they will last several weeks uncut
- New potatoes should be consumed within a week
- Potatoes and onions should be stored separately

Preserving Your Share

There will be times throughout the season that you'll be overwhelmed with a few items you just can't eat fast enough or have run out of creative ways of preparing. When that happens, preserve it. Whether you want to preserve a veggie because you can't stand another bite of it, or because you want to save some to enjoy after the season is over, preserving is easy and can be fun.

Ferment or Pickle (My favorite method)

- Fermenting using fresh vegetables pounded with sea salt releases natural lactic acid to sour and preserve veggies. This process not only extends the life of your veggies, but also increases nutritional value and transforms them deliciously
- You can ferment or pickle almost any hearty vegetable: green beans, cucumbers, cabbage, eggplant, all root veggies, garlic, onion, peppers, asparagus, okra, cauliflower, etc
- No special equipment is required except a clean mason jar and a wooden spoon.
- Use your own blend of spices and herbs to create unique flavors
- Salsa, chutneys and relish can all be creative ways to combine veggies
- Pickles can be eaten after a few weeks or preserved for months, even years.

Freeze

- Corn husked and cut off the cob can be frozen in plastic freezer bags, although they will lose a lot of flavor
- Broccoli, cauliflower and spinach can be frozen after blanching and squeezing out excess water
- Green peas, fresh beans, and fava beans can be frozen shucked
- Grate summer squash in pre-measured quantities for bread throughout the winter
- Mash or puree cooked winter squash or pumpkin to be saved for soups or pies.
- To reduce the amount of moisture built up in a freezer bag, squeeze and suck out the excess air before sealing. Use within 6 months.

Make Sauce

- This takes more work since you need to make sure you follow proper directions for canning to prevent botulism.
- Mason jars, tongs and a pot large enough to sterilize jars are required
- Making sauce is the best way to preserve tomatoes at the peak of season
- Jars of sauce do not need refrigeration but should be consumed within a year.
- If you don't have canning equipment, sauces without dairy may be frozen for up to 6 months

Dry

- Herbs and chili peppers can be easily hung in a dry cool place with good air circulation or on newspaper in the sun.

Marinate

- Hearty greens such as collards and kale can be chopped finely and marinated with spices and olive oil, but should be consumed within a week.
- Charred peppers or eggplant can also be marinated in oil and spices.
- Fresh herbs make lovely infused oils for cooking and seasoning, you can also use chili peppers and garlic.
- You can also use herbs or fruits to make flavored vinegars

Whatever method you choose to explore, experiment and be creative!
Eat well to be well!