



CLOVER SAFE

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY



#55

SAFE PREPARATION AND HANDLING OF FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Clover Safe notes are intended primarily for 4-H volunteers and members nine years and older.



Information available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates an estimated 76 million cases of foodborne disease occur each year in the United States. Although most of these cases cause mild illness that lasts a day or two, the CDC also estimates there are 325,000 cases that require hospitalization and 5,000 deaths related to foodborne illnesses annually.

Foodborne disease is caused by the consumption of disease-causing microorganisms such as certain bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Fresh fruits and vegetables can become contaminated by fertilizers or with disease-causing microorganisms through contact with soils, water, harvesting equipment, raw sewage or fecal matter or other infected foods or food handlers. Foodborne disease from fresh fruits and vegetables can be prevented by following several simple food preparation and handling methods.

Safe Preparation and Handling of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

- Do not buy fresh fruit and vegetables that are bruised, moldy, gashed, or otherwise damaged.
- Keep fresh fruits and vegetables separate from meat, poultry, and fish in your shopping cart, checkout bag, and refrigerator.
- When purchasing cut fresh fruit or vegetables such as salad packages or melons, make sure they are properly packaged and refrigerated in the store. Keep cut fresh fruit or vegetables refrigerated at home and stored in sealed plastic bags or air-tight containers.
- Always thoroughly wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least one-half minute before and after you handle fresh fruit or vegetables.
- Always wash all surfaces and utensils with hot water and soap before and after fresh fruit and vegetables touch surfaces or utensils. Surfaces include cutting boards and counter tops and utensils include knives, peelers, and graters. Sanitize surfaces and utensils by wiping or rinsing them after being washed with a mixture of one teaspoon chlorine in one quart of water.
- Never place fresh fruit or vegetables on the same cutting board where raw meat, poultry, or fish have been unless the board has been thoroughly washed with hot water and soap and sanitized with the chlorine and water mixture.
- Rinse fresh fruit and vegetables with running water, including those having skins or rinds, such as oranges, that are not eaten.
- Fruit and vegetables with firm skins, such as potatoes and carrots, should be rubbed or scrubbed with a clean vegetable brush while being rinsed under running water. Gently use your hands to rub dirt from soft fruits and vegetables, such as peaches and tomatoes, while rinsing under running water.
- After cleaning and rinsing fresh fruit and vegetables, dry them with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- Within two hours, refrigerate all fresh fruit and vegetables that have been cut, peeled, or cooked.
- If fresh fruit and vegetables come in contact with raw meat, poultry, or fish, they must be cooked before eating.
- Each County Cooperative Extension Office has one staff member available for food safety training.

Additional food safety information is available in the University of California Cooperative Extension brochure entitled "Make It Safe - Keep It Safe, FIGHT BAC! Keep Food Safe From Bacteria." The brochure may be accessed online at: <http://groups.ucanr.org/ehs/files/42038.pdf>.

Portions of this Clover Safe incorporate information modified from the Partnership for Food Safety Education, Safe Handling of Fresh Produce web site at: <http://www.fightbac.org/content/view/203>.