

Shopping for Health: Vegetables¹

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Vegetables contain important vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fiber.⁽¹⁾ These nutrients help to promote overall good health. It is recommended that Americans consume at least 2 to 3 cups of vegetables per day,⁽²⁾ but most Americans eat far fewer.

Choosing the right vegetables will help you get the nutrients your body needs every day. With so many choices though, vegetable shopping can seem like a hard task—but it doesn't have to be. This article will help you learn to become a smarter vegetable shopper.

Shopping Tips

Here is a list of tips that will make vegetable shopping easy and fun.

Tip #1

Choose vegetables you know you like and know how to prepare. This is the easiest way to add vegetables into your diet.⁽³⁾

Tip #2

Buy vegetables that are in season because they tend to be less expensive and have the best flavor.⁽⁴⁾ **Table 1** shows a few common vegetables and when they are most likely to be in season.⁽⁵⁾ Search the *Sustainable Table* website at <http://www.sustainabletable.org/shop/seasonal> to find seasonal vegetables in Florida.



Figure 1. Vegetables

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Tip #3

Buy pre-packaged, fresh vegetables that are already washed and sliced. These vegetables don't need any work. They can be added directly to any recipe or eaten as a quick snack.⁽⁴⁾ The downside to these vegetables is that they tend to cost more.

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Tip #4

Canned and frozen vegetables may cost less and have a longer shelf life than fresh vegetables. Canned vegetables tend to be higher in sodium (salt), so be sure to buy the cans labeled “low-sodium” or “no salt added.”⁽⁴⁾ You can cut the sodium content even further by draining and rinsing your canned vegetables. For example, draining and rinsing canned beans lowers their sodium levels by as much as 41 percent.⁽¹⁴⁾

Benefits of canned and frozen vegetables include the following:

- Most canned and frozen vegetables are packaged within hours of being picked. This means the vegetables keep their flavor and nutrients.
- Canned vegetables are ready to use in recipes.
- Frozen vegetables only need to be cooked because the washing and slicing is already done.⁽⁶⁾

Tip #5

Add color to your vegetable choices. Vegetables come in a variety of colors. Eating vegetables with different colors gives your body a good mix of nutrients. The vegetables with the brightest colors often have the most vitamins and minerals.⁽³⁾ For example, bright orange and yellow vegetables like sweet potatoes, carrots, and butternut squash are full of vitamin A. This vitamin helps keep your eyes and skin healthy.⁽⁷⁾ The website *Fruits & Veggies: More Matters* (http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/benefits/nutrient_guide) offers more examples of vegetables and their key nutrients.

Tip #6

If you have children, let them help with the vegetable shopping. Letting them pick their own vegetables makes the shopping trip fun and educational.⁽⁴⁾ Children are more likely to eat the vegetables they choose.⁽³⁾

Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets are a great place to buy fresh vegetables. They often provide shoppers with farm-fresh, locally grown vegetables that are in season. Farmers' markets allow shoppers to know where their food comes from. You may even get a chance to meet the farmer who grew the produce.⁽⁸⁾

Many farmers' markets are now taking part in nutrition assistance programs. These programs include the



Figure 2. A mother listens to her son in the fresh produce aisle at the market.

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Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),⁽⁹⁾ the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program,⁽¹⁰⁾ as well as the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).⁽¹¹⁾

To find a farmers' market near you, visit <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets>. In Florida, you can also visit *Florida MarketMaker* online at <http://fl.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>. *Florida MarketMaker* is a FREE resource and service of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service that allows consumers to visualize the marketplace and connect with producers, retailers, restaurants, and farmers' markets with a search-and-map feature.

Organic Vegetables

The term “organic” has been in the media a lot. Many people wonder what the term “organic” means and if organic foods are healthier choices. The farmers who grow organic vegetables work to keep the soil and water safe. These vegetables are grown without the use of standard pesticides. Vegetables labeled with the organic seal must be grown on a farm that has passed a government inspection.⁽¹²⁾

Are organic vegetables the healthier choice? The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) states that regular vegetables are just as nutritious as organic vegetables. The USDA says that the term “organic” only refers to the way the vegetables are grown, handled, and processed.⁽¹³⁾ Even though there is no nutritional difference, there can be a

difference in cost. Organic vegetables may cost more than regular vegetables.

Whether you choose to eat organic vegetables or non-organic vegetables, the point is to eat more vegetables and to always follow basic food safety rules.⁽¹⁴⁾ For more information on this topic, refer to the EDIS publication, *Fresh-Cut Produce: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers (FCS8740)*, available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy484>.

Learn More

Contact one of the following reliable sources in your county:

- Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Educator (look in the blue pages of your telephone book)—Florida Extension offices are listed online by UF/IFAS at <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu> or <http://SolutionsForYourLife.com/map>.
- WIC nutritionist at your county Health Department (also in the blue pages of your telephone book).

For a referral to a registered dietitian (RD) in your area, you may call the Florida Dietetic Association at (850)386-8850, or check the yellow pages of your phone book.

For more information on vegetables in general, refer to the following resources:

- EDIS publication #FCS8926 titled *Fruits and Vegetables* – <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1196>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – www.usda.gov
- Fruits & Veggies: More Matters – www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

Endnotes

⁽¹⁾ Fruit & Vegetable Benefits. (n.d). Retrieved from <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/benefits/index.html>.

⁽²⁾ Inside the Pyramid. (n.d). Retrieved from http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/vegetables_amount.aspx#.

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[500&rdfreq=500&rwfreq=500&rlead=500&rdepth=0&sufs=2&order=r&cq=&id=4c72cb8f12](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/?page_id=674).

⁽⁴⁾ Inside the Pyramid—Tips to Help You Eat Vegetables. (October, 2009). Retrieved from http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/vegetables_tips.html.

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⁽¹²⁾ National Organic Program. (June, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplate-Data.do?template=TemplateN&leftNav=NationalOrganicProgram&page=NOPGoingOrganic&description=Going%20Organic&acct=nopgeninfo>.

⁽¹³⁾ About The Buzz: You Should Always Eat Organic Fruits and Vegetables? (2010). Retrieved from http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/?page_id=12377.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Jones, J.B., and J.R. Mount. (2009). Sodium Reduction in Canned Bean Varieties by Draining and Rinsing, 2009 Institute of Food Technologists Conference Poster. Anaheim, California.

Table 1. Examples of fresh vegetables by season

FALL	Squash Broccoli Cauliflower Mushrooms Sweet Potatoes
WINTER	Brussels Sprouts Collard Greens Turnips Winter Squash
SPRING	Asparagus Spinach Onions Peas Lettuce
SUMMER	Bell Peppers Corn Cucumbers Tomatoes Green Beans