Date:       June 12, 2013  
To:         Vicki Crosby, News-Miner, 459-7546 (wk), 452-7917 (fax), people@newsminer.com  
From:       Roxie Dinstel via Ronda Boswell  
Re:         Pinching Pennies to run Mondays on page A-3  
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Fresh fruits and vegetables are healthy additions to your diet; however, they can take a big chunk out of your budget. According to the MyPlate guide to eating, half your plate should be vegetables. As you increase the amount of fruits and vegetables you are consuming, make sure that you don’t waste food with improper storage.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are in season right now. Strawberries are still at low prices, and pears, peaches, greens and cucumbers are just coming on the market. Keep them fresh and flavorful by properly storing them.

There are three basic ways to keep your fruits and vegetables: store in the refrigerator; ripen on the counter, then refrigerate; and store only at room temperature. But what goes where? Let’s take a quick look at how to best store fresh produce.

These fruits should be stored in the refrigerator: apples (if kept more than seven days), apricots, berries, cherries, cut fruit, figs and grapes. Vegetables that should go in the refrigerator include the following: artichokes, asparagus, green beans, beets, greens, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, green onions, herbs (except basil), lettuce, mushrooms, peas, radishes, spinach and squash.

Be sure to place fruits and vegetables in separate, perforated plastic bags. If you don’t have perforated storage bags, simply cut holes in the bag to release excess moisture that might cause rot.

Store each group in different produce drawers in the refrigerator, if possible. This will minimize the detrimental effects of ethylene produced by the fruits on the vegetables. Use produce within one to three days for maximum flavor and freshness.

Some produce is picked green and is delivered to the grocery store while not quite ripe. These should be ripened on the counter then refrigerated: avocados, kiwi, nectarines, peaches, pears and plums. Place fruits and vegetables separately in a paper bag to prevent moisture loss. To hurry the process, place an apple with the fruit to be ripened. Once thoroughly ripened, store in the refrigerator and use within one to three days.
What should be stored at room temperature? Apples, bananas, citrus fruits, mangoes, melons, papayas, pineapple, cucumber, eggplant, garlic, ginger, jicama, onions, peppers, potatoes, pumpkins, tomatoes and winter squashes.

Refrigeration can cause cold damage or prevent these products from ripening to good flavor and texture. If you pick tomatoes that are barely pink, they will ripen to a better taste and flavor if they are left at room temperature. If they are kept in the refrigerator, they never develop that beautiful red color. Red tomatoes that are kept in the refrigerator will lose their flavor. Store garlic, onions, potatoes and sweet potatoes in a well-ventilated area in the pantry.

How do you clean your produce? People often ask me if they need to invest in some type of produce wash. It really isn’t necessary — save your money to buy more fruits and vegetables. In fact, you should never use any kind of detergent or bleach to wash produce. Instead, rinse produce under running tap water just before you eat it, including those with skins or rinds that are not eaten. Washing too far in advance of consuming it removes some of nature’s natural preservatives. One exception is lettuce and leafy greens. They remain crisper when washed as soon as you get them home from the store, then refrigerate them.

Packaged fruits and vegetables that are labeled as “washed” or “triple washed” are fine to eat as they come out of the bag. Refrigerate all cut, peeled or cooked fruits and vegetables within two hours.

The latest research says we throw out between 40 and 50 percent of the food that comes into our house. Save money by properly storing, then eating all of the produce you purchase.

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