

Storage of fresh leafy garden greens.

There are many parts to a good green salad, whether a tossed green or a coleslaw or chopped kale salad. You can add any number of toppings like cheese, seed, fruit and a variety of salad dressings. But the foundation is the leafy greens like red leaf, butter crunch lettuce, romaine, iceberg, arugula, spinach, Napa cabbage, bok choy or kale. These are a delicious additions for fiber, vitamins, antioxidants, and phytonutrients into the diet.

But, you go to grab your greens from the fridge for a tasty salad in mind and find a bag of green, soggy goo, that is not much of a reward for your good intentions. Besides, it is can be downright inconvenient and expensive.

In preparing this, I looked state extension service publications from several states and other websites. There is a lot of information on the internet showing that this or that method or gadget will make your greens last forever or at least longer than the person expected. I guess I, too, was looking for a magic bag or container. However, the good news is there a few common principles about keeping greens fresher longer that can be followed by anyone, that are inexpensive and can extend their tastiness a few more days at least.

Bottomline, if you can keep excess moisture from forming on the greens and if you can keep the greens from from drying out by direct contact with air in the refrigerator, they will last longer than left open in the bottom of your refrigerator. Tender, leafy greens Like oakleaf, green curly spinach, bibb or butter will seldom keep more than a week once you bring them home. Romaine and endive, arugula and kale last longer. Fresh picked and local greens obviously extends that time,. So buy what you can reasonably expect to eat in that period of time, prepare and store them well. You will have wonderful leafy greens.

Wash your hands before handling vegetables and keep your utensils and cutting boards clean with soap and water to assure food safety. No need to introduce anything into your salad that can make you or your family sick.

Avoid cross contamination: Do not store vegetables below a shelf in the refrigerator which you use to thaw meat or leftovers. The best place to thaw meat is the bottom shelf, above the crispers because it is the coldest. Save yourself from salmonella or other nasty bugs by putting the package in a bin or pan so that their juices cannot contact your fresh vegetables or fruit.

Wash or rinse your greens in cool running water. Spinach should be immersed in water to allow sand or dirt to settle out. You can cut them into bitesize pieces if you intend to eat them right away. Otherwise, keep leaves/heads whole. Delicate lettuces like bibb or butter can be refrigerated like a flower; just trim the core and place in a bowl in 1/2 inch water with a loose cover. Use outer leaves first. Trim and discard any brown, wilted outer leaves.

Remove as much water as possible from the leaves, either by using a salad spinner or drain in a colander and lay them out on a towel (bath, tea or paper, your choice) to air dry before putting them into your container for storage in the fridge.

Containers serve the purpose of keeping the vegetable from drying out and maintaining moisture. Regardless of container or bag, watch for moisture condensation inside your container once in your fridge. Humidity is good but drops make them decay faster. Replace any moisture absorbing toweling and stir the leaves greens to help them keep dry every time you take some out for a salad. Discard any wilted or limp leaves.

Microfiber or cotton vegetable bags 14" x 18". Some people attest that the cloth pulls excess moisture from the greens, keeping them dry for up to a week. They recommend washing and spinning and completely drying your greens before putting them in the bags. They are washable and reusable but range in price from \$7-10 each.

Bath towel or tea towel Roll: Arrange washed, whole leaves in a single layer on a lint free bath towel or tea towel to air dry. Roll up the towel and secure with rubber bands and place in fridge on bottom shelf. Unroll just enough greens for your salad, and roll your towel up, secure with rubber bands and back in the fridge.

Paper towelling: Wash leafy greens, spin or drain and allow to air dry. Roll up enough greens for a salad in paper toweling and seal the packets in a plastic bag. Take packets out as needed.

Green vegetable bags: These bags are sold in different sizes, can be rinsed and reused several times. The claim is that they absorb ethylene gas which is the major cause of fruits and vegetables going bad. Research is mixed, however. And they can be quite spendy. However, make sure your produce is dry and that the bag is clean and dry as well. Be sure to fold loosely to seal air out as twist ties may damage bag. Also recommended to place a paper towel inside the bag to absorb condensation.

Plastic Produce bags : Re-use, re-purpose and recycle. Some growers recommend storing lettuce leaves in a clean plastic bag left open loosely to avoid excess moisture. Other growers recommend that a twist tie keeps the leaves fresher by keeping the moisture even. Be sure to place a paper towel inside the bag to absorb excess moisture. You could use cloth squares instead.

Plastic Food Storage bags, sealed: Again, wash your vegetables and dry before placing and sealing in a plastic bag with a paper towel to absorb condensation. Change to towel as needed if too damp. Be sure to stir and mix green as you use them to keep them separate and drier.

Note: One produce manager swears that if you place whole lettuce leaves in a Ziploc bag and remove as much of the air in the bag with a straw, that they last the longest in your fridge. Haven't tried it but worth a try. Anyone else interested in a challenge?

Sealed hard plastic containers: Any large plastic container with a lid that seals can be suitable storage. There are some special containers for lettuce with an insert in the bottom to allow moisture to pool below the greens, out of direct contact. Again, make sure greens are clean and dry when they go in and that you watch condensation and to pour off any water that pools at the bottom so mold has no place to grow.

Plastic clamshells of mixed greens are sold at stores primarily. Once you get them home, place a paper towel on top of the greens and stir and sort the greens every time to take some out. Replace the towel as needed. They are great to recycle when they are empty as long as they are clean and you wash your new greens.

Happy Salad Days!