



# Focus on Food



Alice Henneman, RD, LMNT, Extension Educator

**Q: I've heard there's a quick way to remove the skin from tomatoes with hot water. Can you tell me more?**

**A:** Wash tomatoes. Dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds or until skins split. Then dip in cold water, slip off skins.

**Q: What is the correct way to "blanch" a vegetable before freezing it?**

**A:** Blanching is a must for almost all vegetables to be frozen. Blanching slows or stops enzyme action which can cause loss of flavor, color and texture. Use at least one gallon of boiling water for each pound of prepared vegetables. Put the vegetables in a wire basket and lower into the boiling water. Put a lid on the kettle and start counting the time immediately. Keep the heat high for the time specified for the vegetable you are freezing. The length of time will vary according to the thickness of the stem or piece.

After the vegetables are blanched, cool them quickly and thoroughly to stop the cooking. Plunge them immediately into a large quantity of cold water. Change water frequently; use cold running water or iced water. Cool the vegetables about the same amount of time used to blanch them. When the vegetables are cool, remove them from water and drain. For a chart of blanching times for a variety of vegetables, call and ask for in-house fact sheet #108-94. (AH)

## Handwashing program for youth & adults

Have fun using "glo-germ" to teach handwashing as part of the "Clean Hands Campaign!" Call Extension Educator Alice Henneman (441-7180) for more information. (AH)

## Offer a food safety program for your group

Teach basic home food safety by playing the award-winning "Don't Get Bugged by a Foodborne Illness" bingo-type game with your group. Call Extension Educator Alice Henneman (441-7180) for information and to schedule a program. (AH)



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Now that you've read our main article on handling fruits and vegetables safely, here is a pasta salad recipe to enjoy on a hot summer day. Complete with veggies, use this as the main dish for your meal! This recipe is from the Nebraska 4-H "Sharing Our Best" cookbook. If you're interested in ordering this cookbook, call the extension office (441-7180) or ask to see a copy the next time you're at our office.

### Pasta Chicken Salad (makes 4 servings)

- 8 ounces medium shell pasta
- 1 (6-ounce) can white chunk chicken, drained
- 2 cups fresh bite-size broccoli florets
- 1 medium red bell pepper, chopped
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons chopped green onions
- 2 teaspoons prepared mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon dried dillweed
- 1 (8-ounce) bottle Italian salad dressing

Prepare the pasta using package directions; drain. Combine the chicken, broccoli, red pepper, celery, green onions and cooled pasta in a bowl; mix gently. Stir in the mustard, dillweed and Italian dressing; toss to coat. Cover and chill, in the refrigerator. Stir just before serving. May double the recipe. (AH)

# Fresh, fabulous and safe—fruits and vegetables!

Alice Henneman  
Extension Educator

Red, yellow, green, white, purple, orange . . . select from nature's palette of fruits and vegetables to add color and nutrition to daily meals.

The supply of fruits and veggies is especially bountiful during the summer. Gardens, grocery stores and farmers' markets abound with fresh produce.

Recently, fresh fruits and vegetables have been linked with various incidents of food-borne illness. Though these problems are not common, it's important that we, as consumers, handle fresh produce safely.

Following are some general handling tips for fruits and vegetables, including food safety recommendations from the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food & Drug Administration (FDA).

For further information and updates on safe handling of fruits and vegetables, check the Fight BAC! Web site <fightbac.org/>.

Here are some general tips on everything from purchasing fruits and vegetables through serving and handling them safely.

### Purchasing

- Purchase fruits and vegetables that look and smell fresh.

- The Produce Marketing Association recommends you buy only the amount you'll use in a few days for most fruits and vegetables, rather than "stocking-up." With the exception of some items such as apples, citrus fruits and potatoes, most other items don't store well for long period of time.

- Handle produce gently to avoid bruising.

### Storing

- Put produce away promptly. Most WHOLE produce keeps best in perforated plastic bags in your refrigerator's crisper drawer where the humidity is highest. Make sure your refrigerator is clean and cold (40 degrees F or lower).

- Potatoes and tomatoes are two common exceptions to vegetables that should be refrigerated. Tomatoes taste best if they're stored at room temperature and potatoes are tastiest if kept in a cool, dry, dark place.

- Certain fruits may be ripened further at room temperature before refrigeration. These include: apricots, bananas,



cantaloupe, kiwi, nectarines, peaches, pears and plums. (Note: While refrigeration turns the skin on a banana black, the flesh will maintain good color and quality for at least a few more days.)

- Follow label instructions on fresh produce, such as refrigeration and "use by"

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## Potato pointers

Potatoes are the fourth most important food crop in the world. There are 5000 varieties and are the most popular vegetable in the United States. The average American eats about 130 pounds of potatoes each year.

Potatoes are a nutritious vegetable, especially when eaten with the peel. They are loaded with more potassium than a large banana and have more vitamin C than a tomato. They contain more thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and iron than spinach. If you are looking for fiber in your diet, again, the potato is a winner. It has more fiber than a slice of 100% whole wheat bread.

(Reference: *Bowes and Church's Food Values of Portions Commonly Used, 17th edition.*)

Potatoes have different textures because of the amount of starch and water they contain. Those with less starch and more water (Round Reds) keep their

shape during cooking and are good for boiling or roasting. Potatoes with more starch and less water (Russets) loosen up during cooking which make them great for baking.

New potatoes are prematurely harvested and recently picked. They have a high water and sugar content and have a very thin skin. They have a waxy texture because they have not been given enough time to convert sugar to starch. This makes them good for boiling and using in salads.

Choose potatoes that are firm and have not sprouted. They should be stored in a dark, dry and cool (45-50 degrees) place. Do not store potatoes in the refrigerator because their starch turns to sugar and produces an undesirable taste. Do not store potatoes with onions. Onions produce a natural gas that causes potatoes to decay.

**Nutrition Education Program**

Mary Abbott  
Extension Assistant

Keep potatoes in containers that allow good air circulation. Perforated plastic, brown paper or burlap bags are good examples.

Potatoes are very economical. Try adding them to pizza, soups and stews. Add onion, garlic or herbs when boiling potatoes. Mix potatoes with other vegetables like green beans or asparagus. Include potatoes for a healthy diet. (MA)

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