How to store fresh produce in a commercial kitchen.



THE SHORT ANSWER

Most greens, herbs and firm vegetables go in the cold room. Tomatoes, potatoes, onions, bananas and unripe avocados and mangoes stay out of the fridge, in a cool, dry, shaded store. Keep ripening fruit away from greens, and use the oldest stock first.

Three places, not one

Most kitchens lose produce for the same reason: everything goes into the cold room because the cold room feels safe. It is not safe for everything. Some produce is damaged by cold. Some ripens everything around it. And some only needs to be kept dry and dark.

Think of storage as three places, and give every delivery a home in one of them before the driver leaves.

WHERE	WHAT GOES THERE	WHY
Cold room or fridge	Sukuma, spinach, managu, terere, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, celery, leeks, spring onions, herbs, green peas, strawberries, grapes, cut fruit	Cold slows wilting and rot. Most leafy and green produce lasts days longer when chilled.
Dry store	Potatoes, sweet potatoes (ngwashe), nduma, onions, garlic, ginger, whole pumpkin	These keep for weeks when cool, dry, dark and aired. Cold and damp make them sprout, soften or rot.
Counter or ripening shelf	Tomatoes, bananas, plantains, matoke, unripe avocados, mangoes, pawpaw, pineapple	They are still ripening. Cold stops the ripening and damages the flesh.

> Once ripening fruit is ready to eat, a day or two in the cold room can buy you time. The table is for produce you are holding, not produce you are about to serve.

The cold room

The UK Food Standards Agency advises food businesses to set fridges to 5°C or below and to check them regularly. Nairobi afternoons and a door that opens all through service push the temperature up, so read a thermometer at the start of each shift rather than trusting the dial.

- ☐ **Do not wash before storing.** Water left on leaves and skins speeds up rot. Wash just before prep.

- [ ] **Keep greens covered.** A damp cloth or a loosely closed bag over sukuma, managu and spinach stops them drying out in the fan's air.
- [ ] **Stand herbs in water.** Dhania and mint keep for days with their stems in a little water, like flowers. Rosemary is hardy and only needs wrapping.
- [ ] **Take the tops off carrots and beetroot.** The leaves pull moisture out of the root.
- [ ] **Keep cabbages whole.** Cut only what the day needs. A whole head keeps for a week or more when chilled.
- [ ] **Let air move.** Do not pack crates tight against the walls or the fan. Cold air has to reach every crate.

Cucumbers, courgettes, capsicum (hoho) and okra do best in the least cold part of the room, away from the fan. Too much cold leaves them soft and pitted.

The dry store

A dry store is any shaded, cool, aired space off the floor: a store room, a shelf away from the cookers, or slatted crates in a corridor. It needs three things. No light, because light turns potatoes green and bitter. No damp, because it rots onions and sprouts tubers. And air, so heat and moisture can escape.

Keep these apart

- Potatoes and onions, in separate crates
- Onions and anything that smells less than onions
- Ginger and garlic away from damp corners

Check every few days

- Soft or sprouting onions
- Green patches on potatoes
- Mould at the base of a crate

One soft onion or rotting potato spreads to the rest of the crate. Pick through the dry store twice a week and pull anything that has turned.

Ripening fruit and the greens problem

Bananas, avocados, mangoes, tomatoes, passion fruit and apples give off ethylene, a gas that speeds up ripening. That is useful on a ripening shelf. It is a problem next to greens, broccoli, cucumbers and herbs, which yellow and wilt faster when it is around. The UC Davis Postharvest Center publishes storage and compatibility charts if you want the detail.

In practice: give ripening fruit its own shelf, away from greens, both in the cold room and out of it. If you need unripe avocados ready for the weekend, put them together in a crate with a banana and they will soften faster.

First in, first out

Most produce does not spoil in storage. It gets forgotten behind the new delivery. Put new stock behind or below the old, and use the old first.

- [ ] Date every crate or bag with a marker or tape when it comes in.
- [ ] Move older stock to the front before the new delivery goes on the shelf.

- [ ] Keep a short “use today” tray in the cold room for anything that needs to go first.

How long each item keeps

These are working times for produce that arrives in good condition and is stored as above. Hot weather, bruising and a crowded cold room shorten them.

ITEM	WHERE	PLAN TO USE WITHIN
Spinach	Cold room, covered	2 days
Sukuma, managu, terere	Cold room, covered	2 to 3 days
Dhania	Cold room, stems in water	2 to 4 days
Okra	Least cold part of the cold room	2 to 3 days
Broccoli	Cold room	3 to 4 days
Tomatoes	Counter, out of the sun	Depends on ripeness. Buy a mix of ripe and firm
Cabbage	Cold room, whole	A week or more
Carrots	Cold room, tops off	A week or more
Celery	Cold room, wrapped	A week or more
Onions	Dry store	Several weeks
Potatoes	Dry store, dark	Several weeks
Ginger	Dry store	Weeks. Wrinkled skin means it is drying out

Every product page in our food has its own storage note, alongside this week’s price.

Store less by ordering closer to use

The best storage is a short one. Greens and herbs are cheaper to buy twice a week than to buy once and throw half away on Friday. Firm items such as onions, potatoes, carrots and cabbage are the safe ones to buy for the whole week.

Wapishi delivers at times agreed with you, with early-morning and night deliveries on request, so you can split an order into a weekly bulk drop and a smaller fresh drop. Order in the Wapishi shop, or see how ordering works.

Quick answers

Should tomatoes go in the fridge?

Not while they are still ripening. Keep them at room temperature and out of the sun. A cold room dulls the flavour and softens the flesh. Fully ripe tomatoes you cannot use the same day can go in the cold room for a day or two.

Why do my greens go yellow so fast?

Usually warmth, drying out, or being stored next to ripening fruit such as bananas, avocados and mangoes. Keep greens cold, covered with a damp cloth, and away from fruit.

Can potatoes and onions be stored together?

No. Onions make potatoes sprout, and potatoes give off moisture that makes onions rot. Store both cool, dry and dark, in separate crates or shelves.

Should I wash vegetables before storing them?

No. Wash just before you prep. Water left on leaves and skins in storage speeds up rot.

How cold should a kitchen cold room be?

The UK Food Standards Agency advises setting fridges to 5°C or below. Check it with a thermometer every day, not just the dial.

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Wapishi supplies fresh produce and kitchen staples to restaurants, hotels, caterers and canteens. Prices are published every week, and the latest version of this guide is online.

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