



Wilt proof your veggies

A shocking (and hot!) tip for preserving produce

NOTHING IS MORE frustrating than finding the perfect cucumber or head of lettuce at the farmers market, paying top-dollar for it, and then... tossing it out a week later when it has gone moldy or slimy in the refrigerator.

No doubt one reason so many of us eat too many convenience foods and too few fruits and vegetables is that it can be hard to get our busy schedules in sync with the produce we bring home with the best of intentions.

Food scientists, however, have discovered a remarkably effective way to extend the life of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables by days or even a week. It doesn't involve the chlorine solutions, irradiation or peroxide baths sometimes used by produce packagers. And it's easily done in any home by anyone.

This method, called heat-shocking, is 100 per cent organic and uses just one ingredient that every cook has handy — hot water.

You may already be familiar with a related technique called blanching, a cooking method in which food



HEAT-SHOCKING GUIDELINES

The optimal time and temperature for heat-shocking fruits and vegetables varies. Use these as general guidelines.

- > **Asparagus:** 2 to 3 minutes at 131 F (55 C)
- > **Broccoli:** 7 to 8 minutes at 117 F (47 C)
- > **Celery:** 90 seconds at 122 F (50 C)
- > **Grapes:** 8 minutes at 113 F (45 C)
- > **Kiwi fruit:** 15 to 20 minutes at 104 F (40 C)
- > **Lettuce:** 1 to 2 minutes at 122 F (50 C)
- > **Oranges (whole):** 40 to 45 minutes at 113 F (45 C)
- > **Peaches (whole):** 40 minutes at 104 F (40 C)

is briefly dunked in boiling or very hot water. Blanching can extend the shelf life of broccoli and other plant foods, and it effectively reduces contamination by germs on the surface of the food. But blanching usually ruptures the cell walls of plants, causing colour and nutrients to leach out. It also robs delicate produce of its raw taste.

Heat-shocking works differently. When the water is warm but not scalding — temperatures ranging from 105 F to 140 F (about 40 C to 60 C) work well for most fruits and vegetables — a brief plunge won't rupture the cells. Rather, the right amount of heat alters the biochemistry of the tissue in

ways that, for many kinds of produce, firm the flesh, delay browning and fading, slow wilting, and increase mold resistance.

A long list of scientific studies published during the past 15 years report success using heat-shocking to firm potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, and strawberries; to preserve the colour of asparagus, broccoli, green beans, kiwi fruits, celery, and lettuce; to fend off overripe flavors in cantaloupe and other melons; and to generally add to the longevity of grapes, plums, bean sprouts and peaches, among others.

The optimum time and temperature combination for the quick dip seems to depend on many factors, but

the procedure is quite simple. Just let the water run from your tap until it gets hot, then fill a large pot of water about two-thirds full, and use a thermometer to measure the temperature. It will probably be between 105 F and 140 F; if not, a few minutes on the stove should do the trick. Submerge the produce and hold it there for several minutes (the hotter the water, the less time is needed), then drain, dry and refrigerate as you normally would.

The bottom line is that soaking your produce in hot water for a few minutes makes it cheaper and more nutritious because more fruits and veggies will end up in your family rather than in the trash. AP

ALIGN YOUR LIFE

The Fish Pond

I LIVED IN Hong Kong for many years. The city has always been vibrant and full of energy. Every hotel or restaurant I visited had a fish pond located at the entrance or somewhere in the property. Needless to say that business in these properties was booming. The ponds always had colourful goldfish and were big attractions with people. What I came to understand was that all businesses that had invested in creating a fish pond within their premises, were thriving. To be honest, it was my first introduction to Feng Shui. Until then, I knew about energy management and how energy affected people. But I was not aware of how to tame the energy in a property to suit its residents/owners. Once I understood the concept of Feng Shui and liked what I saw, I dived into studying this mystical science. Over the years I have designed many houses, hotels, buildings and restaurants. And my favourite feature while implementing Feng Shui formulas has always been designing a beautiful fish pond.

So why is a fish pond so important in Feng Shui? Feng Shui is the science of energy management and a pond is a big collector of energy. A fish pond is a bit different from simply having a fountain or other water feature. Ponds are often thought of as stagnant, which is not good Feng Shui. But when you add fish, it automatically becomes a vital, moving environment. Most ponds can also be designed to incorporate a small fountain to enhance the energy further. The location of the pond will depend on the flying star chart of the property.

When a pond is located in the water area of the property, it creates good energy and brings in prosperity. It is always recommended to have the fish pond in an auspicious location to help stabilise the business or create a peaceful haven for its residents. Adding plants or stone statues can further enhance the pond.

Creating a pond in your home or building or restaurant will help you activate the water energy and bring about harmony. A small pond can turn around a big business and create much needed harmony in a property.

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