

WASHING

CLEAN-UP CREW It's best to wash greens in cold water in a large bowl placed in the sink, says Trevor Suslow, a food safety specialist at the University of California, Davis. After washing, toss them into a salad spinner (see "Road Test") and give them a whirl. Suslow recommends washing lettuces just before you eat them but if that's not possible, read on (see "Fridge Fresh") to find out how to store greens.

STORING

FRIDGE FRESH

Follow these steps to keep lettuces looking (and tasting) their best.

CHILL OUT

The key to fresh greens? Temperature. The ideal number is between 32 and 34 degrees, says Suslow. Check your fridge to make sure it is in that cool zone.

A HAPPY MEDIUM

If you're storing your greens after they've been washed, dry them off but not completely. "You have to prevent the extremes—not too dry, not too wet," says Suslow. What you want is just enough humidity to prevent wilting. Too much moisture will encourage decay.

LET IT BREATHE—OR NOT

All produce is alive after it's harvested, so it's still respiring, or breathing. Fragile baby greens respire more than hearty lettuces, like romaine, according to Will Daniels of California's Earthbound Farm. That means that baby greens should be stored in containers with lots of oxygen (for example, resealable plastic bags with very little air pushed out). Sturdier lettuces stay fresher with less air, so when you store them, push as much air out of the bag as you can before sealing.

KEEP THEM SEPARATED

Keep fruits and vegetables in separate drawers, if possible. Lettuce is vulnerable to the higher levels of ethylene gas produced by fruit (for more information, see below).

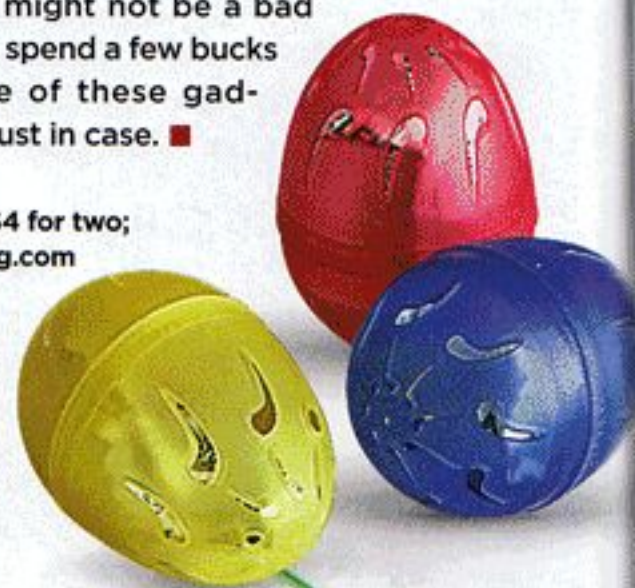
THE ETHYLENE EXPERIMENT

There are many products on the market that promise to keep your greens fresher longer by absorbing or neutralizing ethylene gas, which accelerates the ripening process. All plants release ethylene, but at different levels. Fruits (bananas, apples, tomatoes) typically give off more ethylene than vegetables. Lettuces are particularly susceptible to the gas. Too much ethylene causes wilting and decay.

To see if the claims were true, we ordered an ethylene-neutralizing disk and two ethylene-absorbing products (an egg-shaped contraption and a package of resealable plastic bags). We didn't see much difference—until the fridge broke one weekend. When we opened the door on Monday morning, the crisper was at 85 degrees. Everything had to be thrown away—except for the produce.

Despite what we found, food scientists are skeptical that these products are worthwhile. "How effective they are is debatable," says Suslow. But after our experiment, we think that it might not be a bad idea to spend a few bucks on one of these gadgets—just in case. ■

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4theegg.com



BIOFRESH BAGS
\$8 for 24;
biofreshpkg.com



EXTRALIFE DISK
\$14 for three;
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