

How to Pick the Best

Grade Level: 2-3

Approximate Length of Activity: One-two class periods

Objective

Teacher

1. Teach students how to decide on the best produce to purchase and eat.
2. Encourage students to eat foods from the vegetable and fruit food groups.
3. Help students explore the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables.
4. Challenge students to write in paragraph form.

Students

1. Learn how to select the best fresh produce and have a produce judging contest.
2. Practice classifying fruit and vegetables into the food groups.
3. Discover fruits and vegetables grown in Michigan and explore their nutritional value.
4. Gain practice in writing.

**Michigan Content Standards: (Health) Second Grade: Strand 1-Standard 1-1.1; 1.2
Third Grade: Strand 1-Standard 1-1.1; Strand 1-Standard 4-1.3**

Vocabulary

- **Deteriorate**-to make or become worse or of less value.
- **Characteristic**- a special quality or appearance that makes an individual or group different from others.
- **Consistent**- unchanging.
- **Display**- to put in plain view.
- **Farmer's Market**- a place, usually out-of-doors, where farmers can sell their produce to the public.
- **Firm**- having a solid or compact texture.
- **Growing Season**- the period between the last killing frost in the spring and the first one in the fall.
- **Harvest**-a period of the year when something is best or available.
- **In season**-in a state or at the stage of greatest fitness (as for eating).
- **Mushy**-soft and spongy.
- **Produce**-fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Quality**- grade of excellence.
- **Spoiled**- damaged; decayed.
- **Store**-to deposit in a place (as a warehouse) for safekeeping.
- **Transport**-to carry from one place to another.

Background

Walk into the produce section of your grocery store any time of the year, and you'll find a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Modern transportation and storage methods make it possible for our local grocers to carry all kinds of produce year round. These foods come to us from many different places.

Cantaloupes from Texas, grapes, peaches, lettuce and strawberries from California, oranges and avocados from Florida, blueberries from Arkansas, mangoes from Mexico and bananas from Costa Rica. Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables are available in some grocery stores when they are in season. Farmer's markets are another place to buy locally-grown produce.

The best thing about fresh produce is how good it tastes and how good it is for you. But how can you tell, without tasting, which peach or tomato or cantaloupe will taste the best?

One thing to look for is signs of spoilage. Produce can decline rapidly when it is on display in the grocery store. Many fingers will handle that peach or those grapes before you get to them. You need to handle produce to judge its quality, but you should be considerate of others by handling it carefully. Rough handling causes spoilage and waste.

Fruit that looks good usually tastes good, but fine appearance does not always insure fine quality. Often a very attractive fruit may not taste good. On the other hand, a fruit with poor appearance due to poor color or superficial blemishes may be delicious.

When buying vegetables, check for characteristic signs of freshness such as bright, lively color and crispness. Another way to judge good produce is by weight. The best produce is usually heavy for its size.

Most produce tastes better and costs less when it is in season. Produce grown locally tastes better. Produce shipped long distances must be harvested before it is ripe and doesn't taste as good as produce allowed to ripen before harvest. The nutritional value of produce also decreases when it is stored for a long period of time.

Materials Needed

- Assortment of fruits and vegetables
- Poster boards
- Crayons and markers
- Accompanying chart

Activity Outline

1. Show students the fruits and vegetables you have brought, and have them describe each item out loud. Then have students select one or two of the fruits and vegetables and write paragraphs describing them in as much detail as possible. Challenge your students to classify the fruit or vegetable into the correct food group according to MyPyramid. Have the students research the health benefits of eating the particular fruit or vegetable.
2. Have students write paragraphs comparing and contrasting two or more of the fruits and veggies.
3. Have students write and produce plays with some of the fruits and vegetables as characters. Students should take some time to think about the characteristics of their fruit and veggie characters. Challenge the students to use the play as an advertisement, encouraging consumers to pick good looking fruit, eat healthy choices and be physically active.
4. Divide students into groups, and assign a fruit or vegetable to each group. Have students develop posters or advertisements to persuade others that their fruit or vegetable is best.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do foods that are shipped a long ways not always taste good?
2. How do we pick the best produce?
3. What would you tell others to look for when picking the best fruit or vegetables?

For younger students

5. Have students name and sort (fruit or vegetable?) the produce you have brought to class.
6. Write the names of fruits and vegetables on the chalkboard, and have students practice writing the words.
7. Have younger students say words that describe specific fruits and vegetables.

Related Activities

1. Activities related to social studies
 - Have students survey produce managers in local stores to find out where the produce sold in the store comes from. Students should make a list of specific fruits and vegetables they want to know about. How much of the produce is grown in Michigan?
 - As a homework assignment, have students visit the produce section of a grocery store and look at produce labels to find the origins of fruits and vegetables sold there. Students should make a list and locate all of the produce origins on a map.
 - Invite a produce manager to your class so students can ask questions.
 - Have students prepare questions ahead of time. Ask the produce manager to demonstrate how to select the best produce.
 - Have students locate the origins of their favorite fruits and vegetables on a US or world map.
 - Have students research which of their favorite fruits and vegetables grow in Michigan.
 - Have students use the charts that follow to determine which states produce the most fruits and vegetables. Have students locate these states on a U.S. map and discuss what factors might make fresh produce easier to grow in these locations.
2. Activities related to science
 - Lead a brainstorming session in which you ask students how they would select the best quality fruits and vegetables. Have a produce judging contest. Bring an assortment of fruits and vegetables in a variety of conditions, and have students use the charts provided to determine which are the best quality. Assign a panel of judges to taste the produce and determine which group has made the best judgment, or invite a produce manager from your local grocery store, or invite a nutrition specialist from your county Extension office or local hospital to judge.
 - Observe the effects of rough handling on fruits and vegetables. Provide students with two samples of a delicate fruit or vegetable like peaches or tomatoes. Have students observe the produce and write down their impressions of its condition. Leave one of the samples alone, and have students pass the other around from one student to another until every student has handled it. Have students handle the produce as carefully as possible the first time and more roughly the second. After each round, have students observe the handled produce to see how it has changed. Compare it to the produce that was not handled. Cut the produce open to see the effects of handling. Have students create graphs to record their observations.

3. Activities related to math
 - The quality of many fruits and vegetables can be judged based on the weight relative to size. Discuss the concept of relativity. Have students measure and weigh an assortment of the same kind of fruit or vegetable to determine which ones have the most weight relative to size.
 - Have younger students arrange the fruits and vegetables according to size and geometric shapes.
 - Cut some of the produce into halves and quarters to demonstrate fractions.
 - Use fruits and vegetables to demonstrate addition and subtraction facts. Use fruits and vegetables to demonstrate 25, 50, and 75 percent and to relate to corresponding fractions and decimals.
 - Have students create patterns with the different fruits and vegetables (squash, squash, tomato; apple, orange, banana; etc.)
 - Have students guess which fruits and vegetables weigh the most and then test their estimates by weighing them.
4. The lesson “Be a Food Explorer” located in the health section of this curriculum guide.
5. The lesson “Food...Can You Handle It?” located in the health section of this curriculum guide.
6. The lesson “Fruit for Sale” located in the social studies section of this curriculum guide.

Book Resources

1. “Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English” by Alma Flor Ada, Rosa Zubizarreta and Simon Silva
2. “Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z,” by Lois Ehlert
3. “Alexander and the Great Food Fight” by Linda J. Hawkins
4. “First Day in Grapes” by King L. Perez and Robert Casilla
5. “Farmer’s Market: Families Working Together” by Marcie R. Rendon and Cheryl Walsh Bellville
6. “When Vegetables Go Bad” by Don Gillmor and Mary Louise Gay

Acknowledgement: Adapted from “How to Pick the Best,” Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom.

Fruits / Vegetables	Where it Probably Comes From	What to Look For	What to Avoid	Peak Season	Peak Season in Michigan
Apples - manzana	WA, NY, MI, CA, VA	Firm, crisp, well-colored apples.	Apples which yield slightly to pressure or have bruised areas	September through November	August through December
bananas - platano	Central and South America	Firm, bright bananas, free from bruises or other injuries.	Bruised fruit or fruit with discolored, dull grayish skin	Available year round	Can't grow in Michigan
Grapes- uva	CA, AZ	Green grapes should be almost yellow; red grapes should be mostly all red. All grapes should be plump.	Soft or wrinkled grapes or bunches with brown, brittle stems.	June through December	August through September
Kiwifruit- kiwi	CA	Plump, unwrinkled fruit, firm or slightly yielding.	Fruit that is shriveled, moldy or extra soft	October through June	Can't grow in Michigan
Cantaloupe- melon	CA, AZ, TX	Pale yellow skin, pleasant cantaloupe aroma, slightly yielding at blossom end.	Attached stem, pronounced yellow rind color, softening over entire rind, large bruise areas	May through December	August through October
Watermelon- sandia	TX, FL, CA, OK	Firm, symmetrical melon free of bruises, cuts and dents. Heavy fruit for size. Creamy yellow spot underneath.	Melons that are lightweight or that have dents or bruises	June through August	August through October

Fruits / Vegetables	Where it Probably Comes From	What to Look For	What to Avoid	Peak Season	Peak Season in Michigan
Orange-naranja	CA, FL, TX, AZ	Firm, heavy oranges with fresh, bright-looking skin which is reasonably smooth.	Light-weight oranges. Very rough skin texture. Oranges with cuts or skin punctures, soft spots and weak areas at the bottom.	April to November	Can't grow in Michigan
Peach-melocoton	CA, SC, GA, OK, AR	Peaches that are fairly firm or becoming slightly soft. Skin color between the red areas should be yellow or creamy.	Firm or very hard peaches with a distinctly green color. Very soft fruits. Fruit with large flattened bruises or that show signs of decay.	May through November	July through September
Strawberry-fresa	CA, FL, OR, WA	Bright, clean appearance, uniform good color. Individual small cells should be plump and tender not mushy.	Leaky and moldy berries. Wet or stained spots on containers. Attached stems.	May through June	June
Snap Beans-alubias	FL, GA, CA	Fresh, bright appearance, with good color. Young tender beans with firm, crisp condition.	Wilted or flabby bean pods, serious blemishes and decay. Thick, tough, fibrous pods.	Available year round	July through September
Broccoli - brocoli	CA, AZ	Firm, compact cluster of small flower buds. Dark or sage green clusters.	Spread bud clusters, enlarged or open buds, yellowish-green color, wilted condition.	Available year round	July through October

Fruits / Vegetables	Where it Probably Comes From	What to Look For	What to Avoid	Peak Season	Peak Season in Michigan
Cabbage- col	CA, FL, TX	Firm or hard heads that are heavy for their size. Outer leaves should be a good green or red color and free from serious blemishes.	Cabbage with wilted or decayed outer leaves or leaves turned decidedly yellow. Worm-eaten outer leaves.	Available year round	July through October
Carrots - zanahoria	CA, TX	Well-formed, smooth, well-colored and firm carrots.	Carrots with large green "sunburned" areas at the top and roots which are flabby or show spots of soft rot.	Available year round	July through October
Eggplant - berenjena	FL, CA	Firm, heavy, smooth uniformly dark purple eggplants.	Eggplants which are poorly colored, soft, shriveled, cut or which show decay in the form of irregular dark brown spots.	July through October	July through October
Greens- spinach, kale, collard, chard, mustard, chicory	CA, FL, GA	Leaves that are fresh, young, tender, free from defects and that have a good healthy color.	Leaves with coarse, fibrous stems, yellowish green color, softness or wilted condition.	Available year round	June through September
Okra - abelmosco	TX, LA	Tender pods under 4.5 inches long. They should be bright green in color and free from blemishes.	Tough fibrous pods, indicated by tips which are stiff and resist bending or by hard pods.	July and August	Can't grow in Michigan

Fruits / Vegetables	Where it Probably Comes From	What to Look For	What to Avoid	Peak Season	Peak Season in Michigan
Summer Squash- crook neck, zucchini, pattypan clabacin	TX, AZ, CA	Squash that are tender and well developed, firm and fresh-appearing . Glossy instead of dull skin. Neither hard nor tough.	Overmature squash, which have a dull appearance and a hard, tough surface.	May and June	July through September
Bell Peppers- pimienta morron	CA, FL	Peppers with deep characteristic color, glossy sheen, relatively heavy weight and firm walls or sides.	Peppers with very thin walls (indicated by light weight and flimsy sides), peppers that are wilted or flabby, with cuts or punctures.	Available year round	June through August
Winter Squash - acorn butternut, spaghetti calabasa	TX, AZ, CA	Squash with hard, tough rind, heavy for its size (meaning a thick wall and more edible flesh.)	Squash with cuts, punctures, sunken spots, or moldy spots on the rind. A tender rind is a sign of poor eating quality.	Early fall through late winter	September through December
Corn on the Cob- elote	FL	Fresh, succulent husks with good green color, silk ends. Ears that are well-covered with plump kernels.	Under-developed kernels, very large kernels, dark yellow or dried kernels, wilted or dry husks.	May through December	August through September
Cucumber- pepino	GA, FL	Good green color, firm over entire length, well-developed.	Overgrown cucumbers that are large in diameter and have a dull color. Shriveled ends.	Summer months	July through September

Fruits / Vegetables	Where it Probably Comes From	What to Look For	What to Avoid	Peak Season	Peak Season in Michigan
Lettuce- lechuga	FL,AZ, CA	Freshness, good bright color.	Heads of lettuce which are hard and lack green color. Heads with irregular shapes. Tan or brown around leaf edges.	Available year round	June through September
Sweet Potatoes- boniato	TX, NC,LA, MS	Firm sweet potatoes with smooth, bright, uniformly- colored skins, free from signs of decay.	Sweet potatoes with worm holes, cuts, grub injury, or any other defects which penetrate the skin.	Available year round	August through October
Tomatoes - tomate	FL,CA	Tomatoes which are smooth, well ripened, and free from blemishes. For fully ripe fruit, look for an overall rich, red color and a slight softness.	Soft, overripe, or bruised tomatoes, and tomatoes with green or yellow areas near the stem scar, and growth cracks.	Available year round	August through October