

Harvesting Summer Vegetables: Safe Storage Tips for a Healthier, Chemical-Free Kitchen

Make the most of your fresh produce while avoiding hidden chemical exposures in food storage and preparation.

Summer is the season of abundance. Home gardens, farmers' markets, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs overflow with fresh, vibrant vegetables such as zucchini, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, herbs, and more. For individuals living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), summer produce offers an opportunity to enjoy clean, nourishing food while avoiding many of the synthetic additives and flavours found in processed items. But how we store, prepare, and preserve these seasonal gems can also play a significant role in maintaining a safe, chemical-free kitchen.

Avoiding Chemical Exposure in the Kitchen

When living with MCS, it's not just the food itself that matters—it's everything that comes into contact with it. Common food storage practices, such as using plastic containers or scented kitchen products, can introduce unwanted, harmful chemicals into our diets. Many plastics contain phthalates, BPA, or other chemical additives that can leach into food, especially when used to store hot or acidic items. Fragranced dish soaps, plastic wraps, or scented kitchen towels can all pose unexpected sources of exposure.

Why Avoid Plastic Wrap for Storing Produce?

- Chemical Leaching – Plastics may release BPA, phthalates, or volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into food.
- Odour Transfer – Absorbs and retains strong store scents or chemical smells.
- Faster Spoilage – Trapped moisture can lead to mould or sliminess.
- MCS Triggers – Even low-level exposures can cause symptoms in individuals.

Simple, Safe Storage Tips

Once your summer vegetables are harvested or brought home, store them in a way that maximizes freshness and reduces spoilage—without relying on chemical preservatives.

- Tomatoes: Keep at room temperature away from direct sunlight. Refrigerating them can reduce their flavour and texture.
- Zucchini and cucumbers: Store in the crisper drawer of the fridge in a reusable, breathable cloth bag or wrapped in a clean tea towel.
- Leafy greens: Rinse, dry thoroughly, and store wrapped in a slightly damp (but not wet) unbleached paper towel inside a glass container.
- Herbs: Place stems in a glass of water like a bouquet, and loosely cover with a beeswax wrap or cloth. Keep refrigerated.
- Bell peppers and carrots: Store in glass containers with tight lids or in a dedicated produce drawer in the fridge.

Label jars or containers with the date you stored the item to keep track of freshness and reduce food waste.

Preserving Your Harvest the MCS-Friendly Way

If you find yourself with more produce than you can eat fresh, consider gentle preservation methods that don't rely on synthetic chemicals or intense processing. For example:

- Freeze chopped vegetables or herbs in glass containers or silicone trays for future use.
- Drying herbs naturally in a cool, ventilated area before storing them in glass jars is recommended.
- Batch cooking simple, MCS-friendly meals like soups or stews and freezing them for later.

Always be sure to label preserved items clearly, and avoid using plastic freezer bags or containers with strong chemical smells.

Safer Storage Alternatives:

- Glass containers with airtight lids
- Unbleached paper or cloth produce bags
- Mason jars for herbs and chopped veggies
- Beeswax wraps (unscented) for leafy greens
- Stainless steel containers for longer-term fridge storage

Tip: Rinse and dry produce before storing. Label with date to reduce waste and maintain freshness!



A Safer Kitchen, One Choice at a Time

Summer's harvest is a gift—one that can nourish both body and mind. By using safer storage practices and chemical-free materials, you can enjoy your produce with confidence and peace of mind. Whether you're prepping a fresh salad or freezing garden herbs for winter, the choices you make in the kitchen can have a lasting impact on your well-being.

For more tips on creating a healthier, low-toxicity home environment, visit the [Eco Living Guide](#) and explore numerous resources.