PACIFIC COAST FARMERS' MARKET ASSOCIATION

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GRILLING FRESH FRUITS & VEGETABLES

Not much surpasses the taste of farm-fresh fruits and vegetables cooked on an outdoor grill. The flavor of the produce intensifies when introduced to flames, whether it's grilled peaches or nectarines, mushrooms or zucchini, or big slabs of cantaloupe and watermelon. Grilling enhances the unique taste of all fruits and vegetables by caramelizing their natural sugars and adding a mild smoky touch - not to mention decorating them with those beautiful grill marks!

The most important tip to grilling fabulous fruits and vegetables is to start with the freshest produce. Your local farmers' market is the best place to find the highest quality and the freshest fruits and vegetables, harvested at the peak of flavor and delivered directly from the farm to you. You can also find varieties of this summer produce that you won't find anywhere else.

Here are some other important tips for cooking and enjoying summer's perfect produce on the grill:

- When you expose the surface of vegetables to intense heat, the outside will cook much faster than the inside. Ideally, when grilling you get both browning, or charring, and tenderness, so cook peppers, onions, and corn together. They don't need to be turned frequently and you can keep the grill lid down longer. Grill zucchini and eggplant together since they need to be checked more frequently—every

minute or so.

- Work on clean grill grates for less chance of sticking, or oil the grates.
- You should lightly oil your vegetables before cooking, but don't sweeten your fruit beforehand as it tends to burn. Add afterward.
- Cut the vegetables or fruit into pieces large enough so they won't fall between the grill grates. Thick slices are fine for many items, like potatoes, melons, summer squash, eggplant. For small fruits and vegetables like strawberries, figs, or cherry tomatoes, put them on skewers to cook.
- Another trick for cooking fruits and vegetables is to cut them up, toss with olive oil or butter, and wrap in packets of aluminum foil. Cook for about 15 minutes depending on density of the produce.

What fruits and vegetables can go on the grill?

Fruits: Just about any fruit can go on the grill as long as it is fairly firm. Peaches, nectarines, plums, melons, avocados, and melons are the best fruits that hold their shape over the flames. Fruit is fragile, so cut in large chunks, halves, or wedges.

Vegetables: Choose vegetables with lower water content. You want them to hold together as they cook. Use firmer Roma tomatoes, onions, corn on the cob, zucchini, bell peppers, eggplant, mushrooms, artichokes, and potatoes. You can even grill Romaine lettuce halves!

There are really no rules when it comes to cooking times for produce. Just keep an eye on it and you can tell when they're done. You want grill marks but don't want them to get too soft. Averages cook times are around 7 to 10 minutes for vegetables, a little less time for fruit, on medium-high heat for a gas grill. For a charcoal grill start on the hottest part of the grill for grill marks, then move to a cooler area of the grill to finish cooking.

Be creative! Go beyond the usual corn on the cob and onions. Go forth, conquer those flames, and start grilling awesome fruits and vegetables! Find great summer recipes can be found at pcfma.org/eat