

Most strawberries and raspberries you'll find in the grocery store are grown in arid climates using drip irrigation. Why? These soft-skinned berries are highly perishable, but if the fruit never gets wet, it won't go moldy – at least not before it reaches its destination. In our damper climate, these berries almost need to be eaten – or cooked – within 1 day of picking, but there are a few tricks that will extend their (refrigerated) shelf life. Heat treatment (see below) may tax your patience but it's highly effective – definitely worth trying if your picking window is midweek but you need some berries to stay in good shape for a special weekend occasion!

Prolonging the Fridge Life of Berries

Adapted from an article by Harold McGee
in the New York Times, August 26, 2009, page D5.

ONE of summer's great pleasures is eating berries of all kinds by the basketful. One of summer's great frustrations is having baskets of berries go moldy overnight, or even by nightfall. Fruits go moldy because mold spores are everywhere; they germinate readily on the humid surfaces of actively respiring, moisture-exhaling fruits, easily penetrating the smallest breach of their thin skins.

Berries with tough or shiny skins, such as blueberries, currants, or gooseberries, keep quite well under refrigeration, especially if they're dry when they go in the fridge. **Strawberries and raspberries**, however, are a different story, and red raspberries may be the worst keepers of all – I suspect their non-shiny skins are minutely hairy and trap moisture!

- **Refrigerate** these delicate berries if you want to keep them overnight or longer – cold temperatures slow fruit metabolism and mold growth. For best results:
 - Repack the berries as sparsely as possible, removing any damaged fruits.
 - Nest each basket in a second empty one to leave an air space at the bottom.
 - Inflate and tie off a plastic produce bag around the baskets, so there's room for the berries to breathe and the bag itself doesn't cling to their surfaces.
- **Hot-water treatments** suppress mold growth on berries, grapes and stone fruits. Tests have used temperatures ranging from 113 to 145 degrees F, with exposure times of a few minutes at the lower temperatures and 12 seconds at the highest. Strawberries fare best when placed in water at 125 degrees for 30 seconds. Empty the heated berries onto towels to cool down and dry, then repack and refrigerate. This technique and temperature also work well on raspberries, but you'll need to make sure to turn each little berry "cup" upside down so it drains.