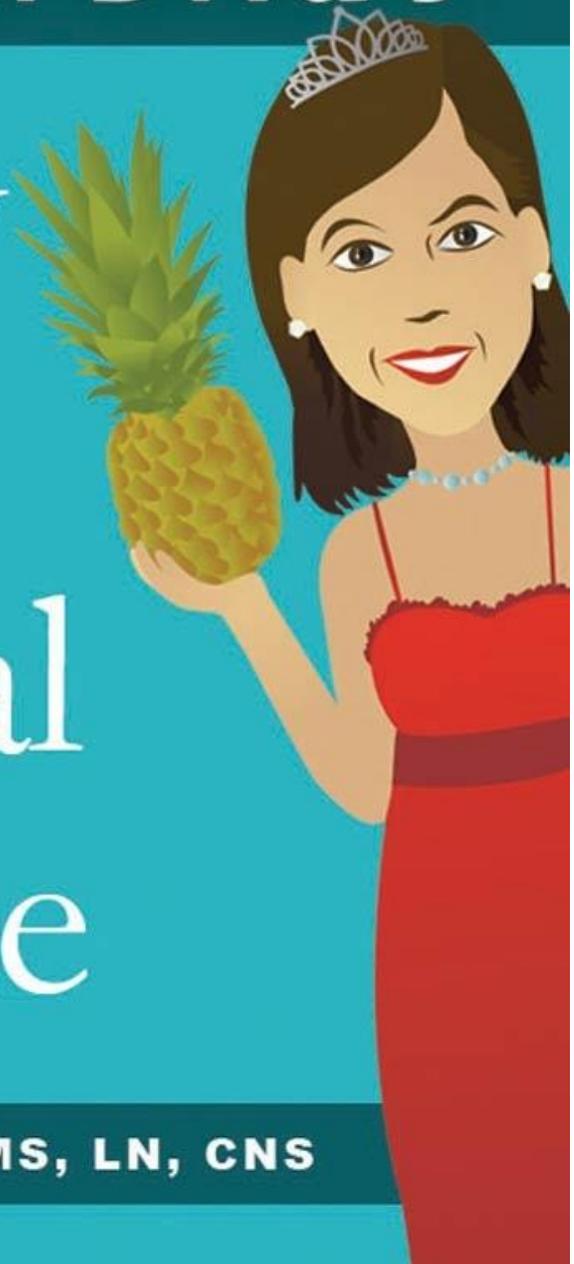


Quick  
AND Dirty  
Tips™

**Nutrition Diva's**

Grocery  
Store  
Survival  
Guide



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# Chapter One

## Shopping the Perimeter

EVERY GROCERY STORE is organized a little bit differently but you'll usually find the least-processed foods arrayed around the edges of the store and most of the processed and packaged foods in the interior aisles. "Shopping the perimeter" is a good strategy for loading up your cart with the healthiest foods. It also simplifies things a bit. After all, most of these foods have just one ingredient listed on the label or no label at all. Nonetheless, there are still a lot of factors to weigh and a lot of decisions to make as you choose what actually goes in your cart.

### Fresh Produce

Most grocery stores are set up so that fresh produce is the first thing you encounter as you walk in the door. Of course, that means that your peaches and other bruiseable goods inevitably end up on the bottom of the cart, crushed underneath a forty-pound bag of dog food. On the other hand, starting with the fresh fruits and vegetables presents an opportunity: The more you pile into your cart here, the less room there will be for all of those treacherous items over in the snack food aisle. Unfortunately, most people tend to under-shop in the produce department. They toss a head of lettuce, a stalk of broccoli, and a bag of carrots into the cart and move on. But hang on a minute: We're supposed to be eating five servings of veggies a day. If you're shopping for two people and you go to the store twice a week, then you should have something like thirty-five servings of veggies in your cart! Of course, you probably eat some percentage of your meals on the road. But you get my point.

As a general rule, vegetables should take up at least a third (or even half) of the real estate on your plate. Logically, this means that veggies should take up at least a third of your grocery cart.

### Why Is Produce So Expensive?

Although fresh fruits and vegetables are the most nutritious items you'll find in the grocery store, they are also some of the most expensive. Or at least they seem expensive. But are they really as costly as we think? I've noticed that many people (myself included) seem to have a double standard when it comes to these things. Those gorgeous red bell peppers, for example, seem kind of expensive at \$1.50 each. And yet we think nothing of tossing a three-dollar bag of potato chips into the cart. The cost per serving works out to be about the same. But the chips contribute virtually nothing to your diet except unhealthy fats, sodium, and empty calories. A

single red pepper, on the other hand, provides more than a day's worth of vitamins A and C, and a decent amount of fiber, folate, and vitamin E. Talk about a good return on your investment!

If produce still seems expensive, just remember that eating more vegetables lowers your risk of disease and can reduce your health-care expenses in the future. Finally, remember that veggies should take up about a third of your grocery cart—so it's okay if they take up a third of your grocery bill as well.

### The Best Choices in Produce

Certain fruits and vegetables have a reputation for being extra nutritious. They're either particularly good sources of certain nutrients, or they've been found to contain uniquely beneficial compounds. Kale is an excellent source of calcium, for example, and grapes are rich in resveratrol, an antioxidant that is thought to protect your heart. The pigments that make plants green, orange, or purple seem to be particularly beneficial to humans, which is why there is often a lot of emphasis on colorful fruits and vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, leafy greens, and berries. But there's also plenty of nutrition in foods like white mushrooms, cauliflower, garlic, and onions.

There are a few nutritional slackers in the produce section as well. Just-picked corn on the cob or freshly dug new potatoes are among the short-lived joys of summer. But on the whole, starchy vegetables like corn and potatoes are on the low end of the nutritional spectrum. [In the table below](#), you'll find some of the most nutritious fruits and vegetable choices. But don't hesitate to play the field. Because the various families of plants have such different nutrient profiles, I think you get more benefit from eating a wide variety of fruits and vegetables than you do from eating the same one or two "super-foods" day after day. When shopping for vegetables, try to include at least one thing from each of the following groups:

GREEN—(lettuce, spinach, kale, Swiss chard, beet and mustard greens, etc.)

RED/ORANGE—(tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, winter squash, red peppers)

CRUCIFEROUS—(cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts)

PODS—(peas, green beans, snowpeas, etc.)

STINKERS—(onions, scallions, shallots, garlic)

## Produce Power Picks

VEGETABLES	FRUITS
bell peppers (especially red, yellow, orange)	apricots (fresh)
cabbage family (broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower)	berries (all kinds)
carrots	cantaloupe
fresh herbs	cherries
garlic, onions	citrus
leafy greens (arugula, collards, kale, Swiss chard)	grapes (especially red or purple)
mushrooms	kiwi
sweet potatoes	pomegranate
tomatoes	
winter squash	

### Getting the Most for Your Money

Another way to get the most nutrition for your money is to look for produce that's in season and grown close to where you live. Local, seasonal produce generally spends less time in transit and storage, where nutrients can fade. Keeping it local also keeps costs down, because you're paying for less fuel. If you garden or go to farmer's markets, you've probably got a good idea what grows at various times of the year in your area. If you don't, you may have no idea whether asparagus is a spring or fall vegetable. See ["What's in Season?"](#) for a quick guide to what's in season when.