

How to Buy

CANNED AND FROZEN FRUITS



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How to Buy CANNED AND FROZEN FRUITS

Canned and frozen fruits, preserved at the peak of goodness, are ready to serve straight from the container and are delicious ingredients in salads, sauces, desserts, and other dishes. They are convenient to use and are always available.

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Points to Consider

Nutritive value...wholesomeness...quality...convenience...methods of use...and informative labeling are some of the points to consider when purchasing canned and frozen fruits.

Nutritive Value

Canned and frozen fruits and fruit juices contain many vitamins and minerals, they are low in fat and sodium. Fruits provide dietary fiber. USDA nutritionists recommend 2 to 4 servings from the fruit group each day. Count as a serving 1/2 cup canned or frozen fruit or 3/4 cup fruit juice. Canned and frozen fruits processed in juice have fewer calories than products in heavy syrups or with added sweeteners. Count only 100 percent fruit juice as fruit.

Wholesomeness

When buying canned fruit, avoid cans that show signs of bulging or swelling at the ends, or of leakage. Small dents in a can usually will not harm the contents unless the dents have pierced the metal or loosened the can seam. Badly dented cans, however, should always be avoided.

Fruits sold in glass jars with twist-off lids are tightly sealed to preserve the contents. If you find any indication that the lid has been tampered with, return the jar to the store and report it to the store manager.

Frozen fruits should be frozen solid. If fruits in a package are not firm, they may have lost quality. Avoid buying frozen fruit with stains on the package since this may indicate that the fruit was defrosted at some time during marketing. To ensure the quality of frozen fruits, pick them up as the last item while shopping, take them home in an insulated bag and store in a freezing compartment immediately.

Grades for Canned and Frozen Fruits

Processed fruits vary in quality based on taste, texture, appearance, and how they are prepared. They are usually priced according to their quality. Because different qualities of fruits are suited to different uses, you can make better buys by choosing processed fruits of the quality that fits your needs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service has established U.S. grade standards as measures of quality for many canned and frozen fruits. USDA provides an inspection service which certifies the quality of processed fruits on the basis of these U.S. grade standards. The inspection service is voluntary and paid for by the user. Under the program, processed fruits are inspected by highly trained specialists during all phases of preparation, processing, and packaging.

Many processors, wholesalers, buyers for food retailers, and others use the USDA grade standards to establish the value of a product described by the grades. If you've been selecting canned or frozen fruits by habit, or can't tell which can or package would be best for the use you have in mind, here's some information that can help you make a wise choice.

U.S. Grade A Grade A fruits are the very best, with an excellent color and uniform size, weight, and shape. Having the proper ripeness and few or no blemishes, fruits of this grade are excellent to use for special purposes where appearance and flavor are important.



This highest grade of fruits is the most flavorful and attractive, and therefore, usually the most expensive. They are excellent to use for special luncheons or dinners, served as dessert, used in fruit plates, or broiled or baked to serve with meat entrees.

U.S. Grade B Grade B fruits make up much of the fruits that are processed and are of very good quality. Only slightly less perfect than Grade A in color, uniformity, and texture, Grade B fruits have good flavor and are suitable for most uses.

Grade B fruits, which are not quite as attractive or tasty as Grade A, are of good quality. They have many uses: as breakfast fruits, in gelatin molds, fruit cups or compotes, topping for ice cream, or as side dishes.

U.S. Grade C Grade C fruits may contain some broken and uneven pieces. While flavor may not be as sweet as in higher qualities, these fruits are still good and wholesome. They are useful where color and texture are not of great importance, such as in puddings, jams, and frozen desserts.

Grade C fruits vary more in taste and appearance than the higher grades and they cost less. They are useful in many dishes, especially where appearance is not important; for example, in sauces for meats, in cobblers, tarts, upside-down cakes, frozen desserts, jams, or puddings.

Other names are often used to describe the quality grades of canned and frozen fruits—Grade A as “Fancy,” Grade B as “Choice,” and Grade C as “Standard.”

The brand name of a frozen or canned fruit may also be an indication of quality. Producers of nationally advertised brand name products spend considerable effort to maintain the same quality for a particular brand, year after year. Unadvertised brands may offer an assurance of a specific quality level, often at a

slightly lower price. Many stores, particularly chain stores, carry two or more qualities under their own name labels (private labels).

Labels

When a product has been officially graded under continuous inspection, labels may carry the official grade name and the statement “Packed under continuous inspection of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.” The grade name and the statement may also appear within shields or without shields.

You may find the USDA grade shield on cans or packages of fruits that have been packed under continuous USDA inspection.

The grade name, such as “Fancy” or “Grade A,” is sometimes shown on the label without “U.S.” in front of it. If the grade name alone appears on a container, the contents should meet the quality for the grade shown, even though the product may not have been officially inspected for grade.

Federal regulations require that the following information be included on the front panel of the label of a can or package:

- The common or usual name of the fruit.
- The form (or style) of fruit, such as whole, slices, or halves. If the form is visible through the package, it need not be stated.
- For some fruits, the variety or color.
- Liquid in which a fruit is packaged must be listed near the name of the product.
- The total contents (net weight) must be stated in ounces for containers holding 1 pound or less. Weight must be given both in total ounces and in pounds and ounces (or pounds and fractions of a pound) for products containing a net weight of 1 to 4 pounds.

The net weight shown on a label includes both fruit and liquid. For the best buy, figure out the cost per ounce. Large containers often cost less per ounce, but not always.

Other information required on the label, although not on the front panel, is:

- Ingredients, such as spices, flavoring, coloring.
- Special sweetener, if used.
- Any special type of treatment.
- The packer's or distributor's name and place of business.
- Nutritional information.
- Labels may also give the quality or grade, count, size, and maturity of the fruit, cooking directions, and recipes or serving ideas.

Commercial Processing

Fruits for canning or freezing are harvested at the proper stage of ripeness so that a good texture and flavor may be preserved. Much of the processing is done by automated equipment and the fruits are handled little by plant workers. Present-day practices help assure us of wholesome, sanitary products with good flavor and quality.

The initial work in preparing canned or frozen fruits is similar. At the processing plant, the fresh fruits are usually sorted into sizes by machine and washed in continuously circulating water or under sprays of water. Some fruits, such as apples, pears, and pineapple, are mechanically peeled and cored. Next, they are moved on conveyor belts to plant workers who do any additional peeling or cutting necessary. Pits and seeds are removed by automatic equipment, and the fruits are also prepared in the various styles (halves, slices, or pieces) by machine. Before the fruits are canned or frozen, plant workers remove any undesirable portions.

Canned Fruits

Cans or glass jars are filled with fruit by semi-automatic machines. Next, the containers are moved to machines that fill them with the correct amount of syrup or liquid and then to equipment that automatically seals them. The sealed containers are cooked under carefully controlled conditions of time and temperature to assure that the products will keep without refrigeration. After the containers are cooled, they are stored in cool, dry, well-ventilated warehouses until they are shipped to market.

Frozen Fruits

Frozen fruits are most often packed with dry sugar or syrup. After the initial preparation, packages are filled with fruit by semi-automatic equipment, sugar or syrup is added, and the containers are automatically sealed. The packaged fruit is then quickly frozen in special low-temperature chambers and stored at temperatures of 0 °F. or lower.

Home Storage

Proper storage is important in maintaining the quality of processed fruits. If you keep unopened canned fruits in a place no warmer than 75 °F., they will usually retain their quality for a year or more. The color, flavor, and texture of canned fruits that have been stored at very warm temperatures or for long periods of time may not stay at top quality, but the fruits still will be safe to eat. Once a can has been opened, the fruit should be refrigerated if it is not for immediate use. Fruits stored in a refrigerator usually will keep well for only a few days.

To maintain the quality of frozen fruits for a longer time, store them in a freezer that can maintain a temperature of 0 °F. or lower. If you wish to use only a portion of a package, be sure to return the remaining portion to the freezer before it has thawed.

Styles

Both canned and frozen fruit are sold in many forms, shapes, or styles. Larger fruit, such as pears and peaches, may be found in whole, halves, quarters, slices, and diced. Smaller fruits are usually whole, but fruits such as strawberries are sliced and halved. It is best to examine the label for a description of the type or style that will best suit the purpose you have in mind for serving the fruit.

Consumer's Guide

The grade, style, and syrup or special flavorings in which processed fruits are prepared all affect the cost of the fruits and how you may want to use them.

Most processed fruits are available in at least two grades. The grade is not often indicated on processed fruits, but you can learn to tell differences in quality by trying different brands. Whole fruits, halves, or slices of similar sizes are more expensive than mixed pieces of various sizes and shapes.

You will find the style and the type of syrup or special packing media on the label of processed fruits. You may choose among canned fruits packed in juice, special sweeteners, water, slightly sweetened water, and heavy or extra heavy syrup. The heavier the syrup, the more sugar or other sweetener that has been added, the greater number of calories, and sometimes the higher the price.

To help you choose the fruit that will suit the use you have in mind, some of the most popular fruits, along with the styles in which they are available, are described below.

Apples

Canned apples are available as slices or chunky pieces, packed in water, in a thickened, sweet and spicy syrup, or prepared with starch, sugar, and spices as pie filling mix. More expensive specialty packs are whole apples, cored like baked apples, with or without the peel, and artificially colored and spiced apple rings.

Applesauce

Applesauce, the most popular form of canned apples, is available in a chunky texture as well as the pureed form. It may also be spiced, unsweetened, or combined with raspberries, strawberries, pineapple, apricots, or other fruits. Top-quality applesauce is a bright color, and there is little separation of liquid from the sauce when it is removed from the container. Second-quality applesauce may be slightly thin or slightly stiff; separation of liquid from the sauce is more noticeable; and the color may be somewhat dull.

Apricots

Canned apricots are delectable just as they come from the can or jar. They also add a piquant flavor to sauces, salads, or baked goods. Apricots usually are packed in heavy or extra heavy syrup and are sold as unpeeled halves, unpeeled whole, and peeled whole apricots with or without the pits. Even in the higher grades, you may expect to find very small blemishes or “freckles” on unpeeled fruit. Peeled whole apricots, prepared from ripe, fleshy fruit, may sometimes be soft, and the pits may be loose.

Blackberries and Similar Berries

Several kinds of “cane” or “bush” berries are prepared as whole frozen berries, packed with or without sugar or syrup. Blackberries are the most common, but you may also find boysenberries, dewberries, loganberries, or youngberries. Canned blackberries, generally packed in water, can also be found on grocery shelves.

Blueberries

A favorite for pie making, canned blueberries are sold as a ready-to-use pie filling mix. They are also packed in water or light syrup.

Frozen blueberries are good as dessert by themselves or served with ice cream. Top-quality frozen blueberries, with their bright blue-purple color, look much like the fresh berries.

Cherries

You will find the varieties of red tart cherries, sweet cherries, and maraschino cherries preserved by canning. Red tart cherries are also commercially frozen, usually in large metal containers with sugar added.

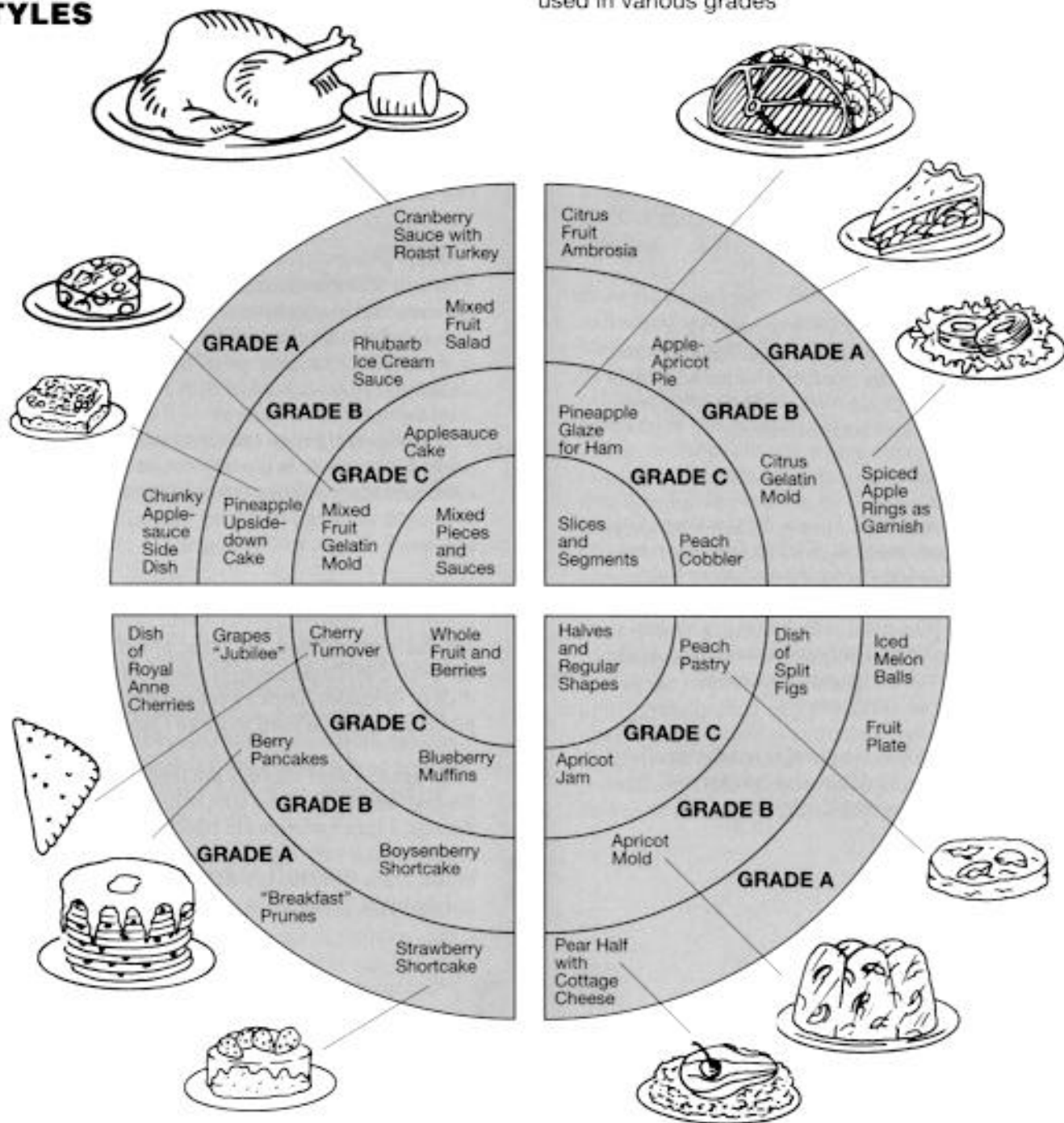
Red tart (pie) cherries are pitted and, when canned, packed in water or in a ready-to-use pie filling mix. Frozen red tart cherries are usually packed with added dry sugar, although they may be available individually quick-frozen without sugar.

Sweet cherries come in light and dark varieties. Most light sweet cherries are the Royal Anne variety and are usually not pitted, but some pitted light cherries are available. Light cherries are often used as a side dish or in sauces. Dark sweet cherries are mostly pitted and may be used to make Cherries Jubilee.

High-grade sweet cherries are tender and thick-fleshed, about the same size, with few cracks or other defects. Light varieties are pinkish-yellow to pale amber with a very light pinkish-tan or tannish-brown blush. Dark varieties are deep red to purple red or purple black. Their colors are bright and uniform.

HOW TO USE GRADES AND STYLES

Examples show how styles (center ring) may be used in various grades



Lower grades of sweet cherries are thinner-fleshed and may be slightly soft to flabby, varying somewhat in size. The color of both light and dark varieties may be slightly dull and not as uniform.

Maraschino cherries are almost always prepared from sweet cherries. They are artificially colored and packed in a specially flavored syrup which gives them their distinctive taste. Often called cocktail cherries, they are uniform in size, with pits removed, and are available with or without stems.

Cranberry Sauce

Canned cranberry sauce, a favorite to serve with chicken and turkey, is available in jellied and whole-berry styles. Top-quality cranberry sauce is a bright color, and the gel is tender. Whole-berry style contains whole berries and parts of berries.

Figs

This naturally sweet fruit, known from ancient times, is a delicious breakfast dish. Kadota figs, the most common pack, are light greenish-yellow to light amber. They are packed in syrup, most of which comes from the fruit itself. The better grades are always whole and practically uniform in size. Figs that are split or broken, usually because of overripeness, are of lower quality.

Other types, found less frequently, are the small Celeste and Mission varieties and “preserved” figs, which are packed in a very thick syrup.

Fruit Juices

Every year, extraordinary amounts of orange, grapefruit, apple, or tomato juices are either canned or concentrated and frozen to meet public demand for them. A wide variety of other juices and mixes, including juices derived from dried prunes, cranberries, and tropical fruits is also available in canned or concentrated form. Other partial juice drinks provide a nutritious and refreshing option when consumed alone or mixed with a variety of beverages and iced snacks.

Fruit juices and juice drinks are commonly packed for individual serving consumption in hermetically sealed aseptic containers. This form of packaging preserves its contents at non-refrigerated temperatures for extended periods of time unless opened. Juices prepared in this manner are especially useful for picnics or other outings where refrigeration is not available. The price may be somewhat more expensive than juices prepared by conventional canning and freezing methods. However, the convenience they offer by their ease of storage, combined with ready access to consumption, may offset the higher price.

Fruit juices, such as apple juice, orange juice, grapefruit juice, lemon juice, or lemonade, are frequently sold in the frozen concentrated form. The reconstitution, normally requiring at least three parts water mixed with a single part thawed concentrate, closely matches the consistency and flavor of freshly prepared fruit juice. Reconstituted juice retains a high degree of the natural flavors found in the fresh fruit.

Grapefruit and Citrus Mixtures

Grapefruit sections may be canned, frozen, or chilled. Mixed grapefruit and orange sections are available canned. The two fruits are also sold as a chilled product in combination with pineapple pieces and whole maraschino cherries. When this combination is garnished with coconut, it is sometimes called “ambrosia fruits.” In top-quality packs, the citrus segments are firm and fleshy and at least three-fourths of the fruits are whole. Canned grapefruit and orange sections are used as breakfast fruits or for salads.

Grapes

Canned grapes, usually of the Thompson seedless variety, are the same kind used in fruit cocktail. They can be used in desserts or gelatin salads. Dressed up with artificial colors and flavors, and sometimes spiced, they are often called “Grapes Jubilee.”

Melon Balls

Melon is one of the few fruits that normally is processed only by freezing. The most popular style is a mixture of honey dew melon and cantaloupe balls.

Mixed Fruits

Fruit cocktail, one of the best known canned fruit mixtures, contains five fruits: diced yellow peaches, diced pears, pineapple dices or tidbits, green-white seedless grapes, and red maraschino cherry halves. The mixture is one of a few canned fruits standardized by Federal law to give a definite proportion of each of the fruits. Peaches and pears make up the greater part of the mixture.

Fruits for salad are carefully selected and almost always of higher grade quality. This canned mixture is a deluxe combination of fruits intended principally for making individual salads. Each can or jar contains approximately equal amounts of quarters or large slices of peaches and pears, apricot halves, large wedges of pineapple, and whole red maraschino cherries. Also called salad fruit, this combination is usually packed in syrup.

Tropical fruit salad comprises various tropical and other fruits to make this interesting canned fruit mixture. Check the label to see which fruits are included. The most common mixture consists of pieces of banana, pineapple, papaya, mango, passionfruit, and melon, packed in sweetened juices from passionfruit or other tropical fruits. Some mixtures contain mandarin orange sections, grapes, and maraschino cherries. The varying flavors and textures in tropical fruit salad make it an interesting and different combination to use in salads or fruit cups.

Other frozen mixed fruits are packaged in a wide range of fruit combinations. The usual pack consists of sliced peaches, dark sweet and red tart pitted cherries, blackberries, raspberries, and grapes. Because they are flavorful while still partially thawed, frozen mixed fruits are a quickly prepared and elegant dessert. If a 10-ounce package is not large enough for a family, you can add sliced bananas, diced apples, mandarin oranges, or melon balls.

Less familiar than other fruit mixtures are canned mixtures of small dices or chips of peaches and pears, often with green-white seedless grapes added. These mixed fruits are a thrifty buy. They can be used in gelatin molds or as fruit cocktail.

Oranges

Most canned oranges sold in the United States are imported. Called mandarin oranges, they are packed as segments that are similar in shape and color to tangerine segments. Because they are naturally sweet, they are usually packed in water or light syrups. They are also available combined with pineapple segments or tidbits. Mandarin oranges have a variety of uses. They are excellent in gelatin molds, salads, and fruit cups.

Peaches

Two types of canned peaches are available: clingstone and freestone. Clingstone peaches have a firm, smooth texture and clean-cut edges. Freestone peaches have a softer texture and ragged edges. Both kinds are yellow to yellow-orange, except for the seldom-seen white freestone.

Both types come in the following styles: whole (usually spiced), halves, slices, quarters, and mixed pieces of irregular sizes and shapes. Once in a while you may find diced peaches, but dices are frequently packed in canned fruit cocktail and other fruit mixes.

Canned peaches are packed in light, heavy, or extra heavy syrups, water, or slightly sweetened water.

Frozen peaches are usually sliced for easy-to-serve dishes and may be used for pie mixes. They are also packed with frozen mixed fruits.

Pears

Canned pears are packed in syrup, water, slightly sweetened water, or juices and are not available frozen. Pears may be found as halves, slices, or quarters, and as mixed pieces of irregular sizes and shapes. Sometimes the variety, such as Bartlett, will be on the label. Styles of pears, such as dices and chips, are used in fruit cocktail and other mixed fruits.

Mixed pieces of irregular sizes and shapes are always of a lower grade because they lack uniformity of shape and vary in texture. The pear pieces, however, are often very good in other respects.

Whole pears usually come colored and spiced. They usually rate a higher grade because they are specially selected as to size, freedom from defects, and proper ripeness.

Top-quality canned pear halves, quarters, and slices have an almost translucent, very light color. They neither vary much in size or shape, nor have a lot of trimmings or broken pieces. The pears may have only a few slight blemishes and rarely have pieces of stem, peel, or core. They also have a tender, even texture, with no graininess or breakdown of flesh.

Lower-quality pears are slightly less perfect, but are still of very good quality. The texture may have moderate graininess and you may find more blemishes, greater variation in shapes, and more broken pieces.

Pineapple

Hawaii supplies us with most of our processed pineapple products. Puerto Rico, Mexico, and other countries also provide us with this fruit. Because pineapple varieties are not the same in each producing area, slight color and flavor differences may occur.

Canned pineapple is prepared by special cutting machines to give almost perfect-sized slices and other forms. You will find 10 whole, cored slices in a 20-ounce can and 8 slices in a 30-ounce can. (The larger can holds slices which are thicker and larger in diameter.) There are also special flat cans containing 4 to 5 slices.

Other popular and versatile forms are crushed pineapple, tidbits, chunks, or large cube-like pieces. Special styles include whole, cored cylinders and spears. All of these styles are most often of very high quality. Half slices and broken slices do not rate as high because of appearance.

Frozen pineapple is available in a limited number of forms, mostly tidbits, chunks, and crushed. These styles may be garnished with mint or mint flavoring.

Plums

Two principal types of plums are canned. Purple plums (or prune-plums) are readily available, while the green-yellow plums (sometimes called Green Gage or Yellow Egg) are not always in stores. Purple plums usually are not peeled; green-yellow plums are. Usually, neither type is pitted. As with other fruits, plums are packed in syrups of different sweetness.

Prunes

Dried prunes in cans or glass jars are ready to serve. Packed in extracted prune juice, they are commonly known as “Prunes, Prepared From Dried Prunes.”

Raspberries

Both red and black raspberries are frozen and canned. Because raspberries are so delicate, you can expect some slightly crushed berries, even in high-quality packs.

Frozen red raspberries are usually packed in a sugar syrup. Handle them carefully and follow package directions closely to keep these berries plump and fresh-looking.

Rhubarb

Grown for its edible stalk, rhubarb is not really a fruit, but is used as one. Rarely canned, but frozen with a high proportion of sugar, rhubarb must be cooked before use. Before cooking, its color will be pinkish to green.

Strawberries

A year-round favorite, frozen strawberries can be purchased whole, sugared or unsugared. They are also available as slices or halves with sugar added. When thawed, the sugar melts with the natural juices of the strawberries to form a syrup.

Frozen strawberries come in a wide range of packaging: whole berries loose in large see-through bags, and all styles in cups, cartons, or special fiber-metal end cans. Quick-thaw pouches (which can be placed in warm water) make it possible to use the berries almost immediately.

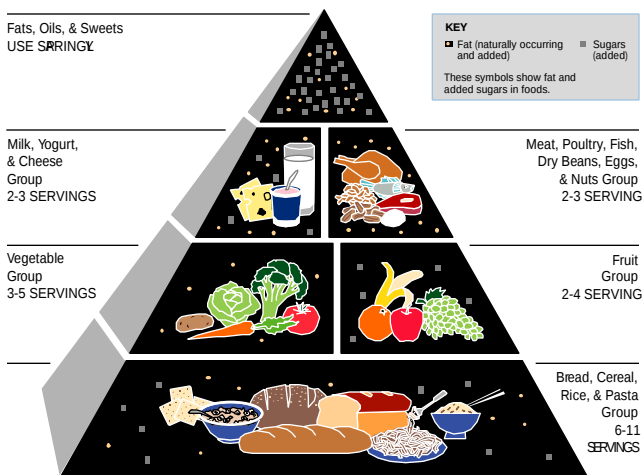
Only limited amounts of strawberries are canned, but canned strawberry pie fillings are seen more and more often in stores. Because strawberries become pale during canning, these products are often artificially colored. If so, the label will name the artificial coloring as well as other ingredients.

Top-quality frozen strawberries possess a high proportion of well-colored red berries or slices. Whole berries are reasonably firm, not seedy, and have only a few blemishes, stems, or pieces of caps. Sliced berries are equally as good, although there may be a few mushy portions. Slicing and subsequent freezing often cause mushiness of the riper berries. Lower quality frozen strawberries are less colorful with more pinkish berries or slices.

For information about nutrition, write:
 U.S. Department of Agriculture,
 Human Nutrition Information Service,
 6505 Belcrest Road,
 Hyattsville, MD 20782.

Food Guide Pyramid

A Guide to Daily Food Choices



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Use the Food Guide Pyramid to help you eat better every day...the Dietary Guidelines way. Start with plenty of Breads, Cereals, Rice, and Pasta; Vegetables; and Fruits. Add two to three servings from the Milk group and two to three servings from the Meat group. Each of these food groups provides some, but not all, of the nutrients you need. No one food group is more important than another - for good health you need them all. Go easy on the fats, oils, and sweets, the foods in the small tip of the Pyramid.

The "Food Guide Pyramid" booklet (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service, August 1992, Leaflet No. 572) can be purchased from the Consumer Information Center, Department 119-A, Pueblo, CO 81009. Make check or money order payable to the Superintendent of Documents.

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Most canned and frozen fruits are packed and priced according to quality (grade) even if the grade isn't indicated on the retail package.

Know the Grade

Grade A: Top-quality, ripe, tasty fruits with excellent flavor and color. This quality of fruit is probably the most expensive, but they are the most tender and flavorful. They make the most attractive dessert servings for special luncheons or dinners.

Grade B: Slightly less perfect eye appeal but still with good flavor and color. They are usually less expensive than Grade A fruit, but can be served as a dessert dish or in gelatin salads.

Grade C: Mature, slightly imperfect fruit that is less tasty or visually appealing than Grades A and B. Thrifty and good choice when used as ingredient in compotes, desserts, etc.

Look for the U.S. Grade Name

The U.S. Grade name on a can or package means the fruit has been packed under continuous USDA inspection. The grade name or the continuous inspection statement may be shown within the USDA shield.

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