

TAKE CARE: HOW TO HANDLE AND STORE FRESH U.S. TABLE-STOCK POTATOES

U.S. table-stock potatoes are living foods! They continue to undergo metabolic processes after harvest, making proper handling and storage critical to quality. Familiarize yourself with these best practices to keep potatoes in prime condition from the point of purchase onward. And remember: careful treatment can slow potato metabolism, but it can't stop it.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR	POTENTIAL PROBLEM	WHAT TO DO
Temperature	When the temperature's too high, potato metabolism increases; when it's too low, it exacerbates bruising and internal discoloration and converts starches to sugars, which can cause potatoes to darken when fried. Further, variable temperatures can trigger sprouting.	Proper temperature is the most important storage management tool. Temperatures between 7.2°C and 10°C (45°F and 50°F) are ideal for most potato types.
Humidity	Low humidity levels lead to excessive shrinkage and shriveling. By contrast, too much humidity causes disease problems.	Maintain relative humidity around 95% in potato storage areas. If using humidifiers, prevent water droplets from forming or dripping onto potatoes. If humidification isn't available, simply wet the storage floor—but don't wet the potatoes. Maintain proper ventilation, too. Store potatoes on a pallet to encourage air circulation and limit spoilage by allowing the potatoes to respire. Make sure to leave room for airflow between pallets and walls, too.
Light	Excessive light turns potatoes green and gives them a bitter taste.	Turn off storage lights and minimize exposure to all other lighting. And minimize the time that potatoes spend in loading areas and other uncontrolled environments.
Sanitation	Improper sanitation can accelerate disease development. Allowing a moisture film to form on potatoes can lead to rot.	Clean and sanitize all potato-handling equipment. Thoroughly dry washed potatoes before repacking.
Handling	Rough handling at any link in the supply chain can cause serious quality problems.	To minimize bruising, keep temperatures above 10°C (50°F) before handling. Avoid dropping or bruising potatoes—a fall of even a few inches causes bruising.

References: Fresh Potato Handling and Storage Guidelines. Dr. Joe Guenther, University of Idaho.