

Tips for Handling Plums at Receiver End

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At arrival, preripened plums should be cold (below 36°F) and with firmness (measured at any position on the fruit) of 4-6 pounds average ranging from 2 to 8 pounds in a given box. This firmness variability (2 and 8 pounds) in a given preripened box is standard due to natural fruit firmness variability. A fine tuning of this protocol is to evaluate the potential bruising damage of low firmness plums (2-3 lbf) under your specific handling situation. I believe it is more important to spend energy on following the protocol such as enforcing arrival temperature and minimum SSC rather than trying to have a uniform firmness in the box. My experience has been that consumers will eat the ripe fruit first (2-3 lbf) and wait the next three days to eat less ripe fruit (4-6 lbf). For example if they are buying 1 pound of plums (~7 plums) and in this group there are plums with 2 to 6 pounds, they will eat first the plums below 3 lbf. After 24-48 hours at room temperature, more plums from this group will be in the below 4 lbf ideal eating category. Even plums with 6 lbf at buying time (store) will be segregating in this desired ripe group.

Plum Store Display Suggestions

- Produce managers need to be educated about this new plum “Ready to Buy” type of fruit (preripened).
- Minimize mechanical damage and expedite an effective rotation (first in, first out).
- The dry tables should be labeled as preripened plums or “Ready to Buy/Eat” and consumers should understand that this fruit is riper than conventionally packed tree fruit.
- In order to protect preripened fruit, the display should be no more than two layers deep. In-box or clam shell display should be attempted.
- As plums will continue to ripen on the display warm/dry table, they should be checked often and the softest fruit be placed at the front of the display.
- Fruit that reaches the “Ready to Eat” ripeness of 2 to 3 pounds cheek firmness need to be sold quickly or placed in refrigeration to extend their shelf life.
- Consumers should be instructed that this type of fruit (soft) should be refrigerated if fruit are not going to be consumed within 3 days of purchase.

Tips for Handling Plums Once You Have Them at Home

- After purchasing fresh preripened plums at the grocery store, do not eat them until they are ripe (soft and aromatic) and do not put them in the refrigerator until they are ripe.
- The fruit looks nice in a basket or bowl on the countertop or table. It is ripe when it smells sweet and fruity and yields slightly to the touch. Ripe plums can then either be eaten or placed in the refrigerator to be eaten within the next 2-3 days.
- Putting hard fruit in the refrigerator before it is ripe exposes it to the "killing zone" temperatures between 36 and 50°, which stop the ripening process and ruin the fruit flavor and texture.
- If plums do not ripen properly, let your produce manager know.

More information on this subject can be found on the following websites:

- <http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/> and <http://www.uckac.edu/postharv/>