

News Release

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Summer is melon-time

One of summer’s favorite foods is melons. They are in the same family as squashes and cucumbers because they all grow on vines. There are several different varieties of melons available at your local farmer’s market and supermarket.

Three of the most common melons are cantaloupe, honeydew and watermelon. Cantaloupe has become the common name for all netted, musk-scented melons or muskmelons. Honeydew melons are another type of melon with white or green flesh although some newer varieties may have orange or pink flesh. There are more than 50 varieties of watermelons. Most have red flesh, but there are orange and yellow-fleshed varieties as well.

Melons are best when picked at the peak of ripeness, yet still firm. It can be difficult to judge a melon’s ripeness and taste from the outside. Select melons that are free of cracks, bruises or soft spots and have a clean break at the stem. For cantaloupes and honeydews, pick one that is fragrant since that can be a clue to its ripeness. A ripe melon will be firm with a slight softness, but not spongy. For watermelons, find one that is heavy for its size, since it is 92% water. Look for a buttery yellow underside where the watermelon touched the ground. It is not necessary to thump or shake to determine the ripeness of a melon.

Melons are very perishable and bruise easily so handle carefully. You can let a melon sit at room temperature for two to three days to soften and bring it to full juiciness. Cut melons should be
stored in the refrigerator for up to three days. Ripe melons are very fragrant, and the aroma of a cut melon can penetrate and affect other foods, so store in air-tight containers.

The outer surfaces of melons may have harmful bacteria. Therefore, wash the whole fruit in cold running water thoroughly before cutting and eating. This prevents the knife blade from carrying bacteria from the rind into the flesh. Cut melon with a sturdy knife and remove seeds and strings. It can be served in many attractive ways: cut into halves, quarters, wedges, or cubes; or the flesh can be scooped out with a melon baller.

Melons are low in calories but high in nutritional value. Most are excellent sources of vitamin C and potassium. Varieties with deep orange flesh, such as cantaloupe, are exceptional sources of beta carotene, which provides vitamin A. The great thing about melons, because of their high water content, is that the calorie and fat values are low. Melons also provide excellent sources of antioxidants which are important to our health. Use melons to boost your intake of fruits and vegetables.

Cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon are the best known melons, but also be adventurous and try casaba, Crenshaw, Persian melons, or other varieties. Some are grown in the United States. Others are imported from Central America and New Zealand. Enjoy the taste of summer with melons.