



## Summer is Ripe for Juicy Melons

By: Patti Griffith, University Extension Educator, Nutrition and Food Safety, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service – Northwest Area.

What says summer more than a juicy red watermelon or sweet tasting cantaloupe? Melons have been a favorite food for centuries. Watermelon seeds were found in the tomb of Tutankhamen. Napoleon and Pope John Paul II considered honeydew melons their favorite fruit. Fresh, ripe watermelon and cantaloupe is a refreshing treat at picnics and the perfect end to a backyard barbecue.

Melons are divided into two classes, *watermelon* and *muskmelon* which includes cantaloupe, honeydew, Crenshaw, and casaba melons. Watermelons, considered one of America's favorite fruit, are cousins to the cucumber and kin to the gourd. Americans purchase and consume about 3 billion pounds of watermelon annually. While most watermelons will range around 25 pounds, the largest watermelon on record was grown in Bixby, Oklahoma, and weighed in at 255 pounds.



To really enjoy melons, you want to select the most delicious, ripest melon you can find, but how do you tell if a melon is ripe? Following are some useful tips in selecting melons:



**Cantaloupe** are popular because they're easy to select and very sweet.

Ripe cantaloupe have dull yellow backgrounds with raised netting. Avoid those with protruding stems, or tears in the rind at the stem end; they're tell-tale signs that the melon was picked too soon. When ripe melons are picked, the stem falls off easily, leaving a small, clean depression. After checking the stem end, flip the melon over and check the blossom end. It should be fragrant and yield a bit when pressed.

**Honeydew** are large, choice melons with either green or orange flesh. As honeydew ripen, they turn from green to creamy white to yellow. Avoid green ones, but a creamy white one (unlike other melons) will ripen on your countertop in a few days. Perfectly ripe honeydew will yield just a bit to pressure at the blossom end and have a sticky, velvety rind.



Good-quality **Casaba** melons are fairly large and firm with a little softness at the stem end. The coloring will be rich yellow with very little green on the skin. The rind will be ridged when the melon has been allowed to ripen on the vine and the skin will have a slightly waxy feel when the melon is ripe. Casaba melons should be stored at room temperature until fully ripe and the skin has turned bright yellow. You can refrigerate cut Casaba for up to two or three days. Avoid melons that are too firm, too soft, extremely green-colored, or that have dark blemishes on the skin.



There are about 50 varieties of **watermelon** on the market. They all taste similar, but



vary in size, flesh color, and whether they are seeded or seedless.

**Picnic melons** are largest, while **icebox melons** are round and compact. Many stores also carry **yellow-fleshed**, **white-fleshed**, and **seedless melons**. The melon should be heavy for its size, and free of bruises, soft spots, or cuts. To check for ripeness, look at the pale side of the melon (where it rested while growing); it should be yellow, not white. If your market sells halved watermelons, inspect the flesh; it should be firm, brightly colored, and free of white streaks. Seeded watermelons should have dark brown or black seeds. To store, wrap watermelon slices loosely in plastic and refrigerate for up to two days. Uncut watermelon can be stored in a cool spot for up to two weeks.

Be sure to practice food safety and wash melons thoroughly with a vegetable brush and plenty of water just before cutting. Use a clean knife and a clean surface when cutting melons. Minimize the growth of harmful bacteria that might be present by refrigerating cut melon before serving. When transporting melons to a picnic, consider cutting up the melon at home, placing pieces into a covered food container, and storing the container in a chest full of ice until serving.

Melons are an excellent source of Vitamins A and C, and a very good source of potassium and phytochemicals. They are low in calories, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium.

Melons do make interesting pickles and wine. For reliable information on pickling melons, use the U.S. Department of Agriculture *Complete Guide to Home Canning*, [www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food\\_Preserve/usda\\_home\\_canning.htm](http://www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food_Preserve/usda_home_canning.htm). Other reliable sources of food preservation information include the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service Food and Nutrition website, [www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food\\_Preservation.htm](http://www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food_Preservation.htm); the current *Ball Blue Book* or the *Ball Blue Book* on-line at [www.freshpreserving.com](http://www.freshpreserving.com); or the *So Easy to Preserve* book from the University of Georgia Extension Service. Be sure to adapt canning recipes for your altitude.

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, melon can be cut into edible slices, cubes or balls and frozen, either in a syrup or in an unsweetened pack. The melon balls enjoyed straight from the freezer in the summer, as a type of frozen fruit treat.

---

## Melon Grape Salad

- 1 c. cubed cantaloupe
- 1 c. cubed and seeded watermelon
- 2 c. green seedless grapes
- 5 tsp. lime juice
- ½ c. honey
- 2 Tbsp. Dijon mustard

Toss fruit with 1 Tbsp. of lime juice and refrigerate, covered. When ready to serve, pour out the liquid, drying out the serving bowl. Whisk together remaining lime juice, honey and mustard. Toss with fruit.

---

Summer is the time to enjoy the sweet taste of melons, whether in salad or in finishing a meal. This low-calorie, nutrition-packed food pleases young and old alike.

For *Living Well in Wyoming* food preservation tips, contact your University of Wyoming Extension Nutrition and Food Safety Educator.



### Sources:

1. *Canner's Corner, Issue 2*, [www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food\\_Preserve/Canners\\_Corner.htm](http://www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food_Preserve/Canners_Corner.htm), Patti Griffith, University Extension Educator, Nutrition and Food Safety, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service – Northwest Area.
2. RockyFordMelon.com
3. *Why is Sliced Melon a Dangerous Food?*, Dr. Angela Fraser, Food Safety Specialist, Family and Consumer Sciences, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, North Carolina State University.
4. *How do I....Freezing Melons*, National Center for Home Food Preservation, [www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/freeze/melon.html](http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/freeze/melon.html).

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperate.  
The University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

June, 2011