Watermelon

Grow

Watermelon is a fruit which grows on a vine. It is a close cousin to cucumbers, pumpkins, and squash.[1]

Watermelons need five things to grow and produce fruit: sun, water, bees, nutrients, and a lot of space! They thrive in sandy or sandy loam soil. Give each plant at least 5 feet of space, as their vines spread rapidly. Watermelon can be grown from seed or transplants from a nursery. Honeybees must pollinate the watermelon blossom for fruit to be produced. In North Carolina, watermelons can be planted from mid-April to late June. Melons should ripen after about 3 months of sunny, hot weather.[2,3]

Not Just Any Ol' Watermelon

Watermelons do not always have a red color and seeds inside. There are a variety of different watermelons. Try some of these:

Icebox: Mickeylee, Petite Sweet, Sugar Baby, Tiger Baby, Yellow Doll
Picnic: Crimson Sweet, Jubilee, Moon and Stars, Royal Sweet
Seedless: Jack of Hearts, King of Hearts, Queen of Hearts
Yellow Flesh: Desert King, Honeyhart, Orangeglo, Orange Tendersweet, Tender Sweet, Tenderfold[1,3,4]

Fun Fact: About 300 varieties of watermelon are grown in the United States and Mexico. Only 50 are very popular.[3]

Choose

Watermelon can be available year round. In N.C., peak season is July to mid-October. It is not always easy to pick the right watermelon. It is hard to tell how sweet a melon will be just by looking at the outside. Choose one that is symmetrical in shape without dents, bruises or cuts. The exterior should be firm, the stem dry and the rind dull, not shiny. Thump, if you must (listen for a dull, hollow sound). Turn the watermelon over. The underside should be creamy yellow. (This is where the watermelon rested on the ground when it was growing.)[3,4]

Fun Fact: Watermelons can have red, orange or yellow flesh.[1] Lycopene is a pigment that can give produce like watermelon its red color.[3]

Store

Store whole watermelon at room temperature (50-60°F) up to 2 weeks. Handle carefully to prevent internal bruising. Cut watermelon should be covered loosely with plastic wrap and stored in the refrigerator up to 3-4 days.[4]

Fun Fact: The U.S. ranks 5th in the world for watermelon production.[3]

Use

Most watermelons produced in the U.S. are eaten fresh. Watermelon is tasty eaten by itself or added to salads, sandwiches, salsa or smoothies. It can be pureed for a cool, refreshing soup. Other watermelon products include pickled rind, roasted seeds, and juice.[1]

Before cutting into a watermelon, be sure to wash the outside of the melon very well with clean, running water. The outside layer can have germs or bacteria that you do not want to transfer to the fruit.[3]

Fun Fact: In the U.S., 44 states grow watermelons commercially. The top producers are Georgia, Florida, Texas, California and Arizona. N.C. ranks 8th.[3,5]

FOOD CORPS NORTH CAROLINA
NC State University A&T State University COOPERATIVE EXTENSION Empowering People · Providing Solutions
got to be NC AGRICULTURE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction
SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION of NORTH CAROLINA

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. 08/14
http://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov

Watermelon

Teach

Watermelon Hieroglyphics

Watermelons originated in Africa over 5,000 years ago. The first watermelon harvest recorded was in ancient Egypt, illustrated in hieroglyphics (formal Egyptian writing) on the walls of buildings. Since the 10th century, watermelons have been grown in China. Today, China is the #1 producer of watermelons in the world. [1,3]

The Bigger, the Better

The average watermelon is 22-26 pounds. The world's heaviest watermelon was documented by Guinness World Records and was grown in Arkansas in 2005 by a man named Lloyd Bright. Lloyd's watermelon was 268.8 pounds![3]

Fun Fact: The name is true. A watermelon is 92% water![3]

Class Activity

Materials Needed:

- Watermelon with seeds, cut open
- Seedless watermelon, cut open
- Watermelon seeds (about 10-15)
- Planting pot or a sunny place outside to plant seeds
- Soil (enough to fill the planting pot, if using)
- Water

Steps:

1. Show students the watermelons (with/without seeds).
2. Explain how watermelons with seeds and without seeds are produced. Compare and contrast.
3. If using a planting pot, fill with soil.
4. Place seeds one inch deep in the soil.
5. Water immediately after planting and once a week.
6. Have students observe, measure and record growth. (Plants should appear in about 10 days.)
7. Remove the weakest plants and any weeds that may grow close to the seeds.

Fun Fact: July is National Watermelon Month![3]

Eat

Watermelon is a winner with nutrients. One cup has less than 50 calories, no cholesterol and little fat and sodium. It is an excellent source of vitamin C. It is also a good source of vitamin A. Vitamin C helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, protects us from infections and bruising, aids in healing, keeps our gums healthy, helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Vitamin A promotes normal vision, supports the growth and health of cells and tissues, protects us from infection, and helps regulate the immune system. It also works as an antioxidant in the form of carotenoids (which form vitamin A). Watermelon also has potassium. Potassium helps maintain normal blood pressure, regulate fluids and mineral balance, transmit nerve signals and contract muscles. Most red fruits and vegetables, like watermelon, have lycopene. Lycopene is a phytonutrient which may reduce cancer risk.[1,3,6,7]

Fun Fact: Where do seedless watermelons come from? Chromosomes give traits to living things, including plants. Breeders discovered that crossing a diploid plant (two sets of chromosomes) with a tetraploid plant (four sets of chromosomes) resulted in a fruit that yields a triploid seed (three sets of chromosomes). Triploid seeds produce seedless watermelons. Seedless watermelons do not have mature black seeds. They may have white seed coats, where a seed did not mature.[3]

Find

For more watermelon info and resources, visit:

1. http://lancaster.unl.edu/nep/fruitveggie.shtml
2. www.ces.ncsu.edu
3. www.watermelon.org
4. www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fruits-vegetables-galore-helping-kids-eat-more
5. www.ncagr.gov
6. www.ncmelons.com
7. www.eatright.org

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. 08/14
http://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov