

Wild For Watermelon

What would summer be without juicy, sweet watermelon? For a long time, watermelon has been taken for granted as a sweet, tasty summertime fruit made of sugar and water and nothing more. As it turns out, watermelon is incredibly healthy! Watermelon is packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and phytonutrients your body needs for healthy development. Watermelon is an excellent source of vitamins A and C. Watermelon is also low in calories – about 90 calories in 2 cups.

The most common watermelon types are:

Seeded, the classic watermelon comes in a wide range of sizes.

The majority of watermelons grown today are seedless. They are the result of hybridization – the crossing of two different types of watermelons.

Petite watermelons are easy to handle. They have thinner rinds which translates into more flesh per pound.

Shopping for a watermelon can be challenging because you can't see the inside of the fruit until you go home and cut it open. When selecting a watermelon, follow these three simple steps: Look, Lift, and Turn.

1. **Look** at the watermelon to make sure it is firm, symmetrical, and free from bruises, cuts, and dents.
2. **Lift** it up to verify that it is heavy for its size.
3. **Turn** the watermelon over. Look for the field spot. There should be a light, creamy yellow spot on one side from where it sat on the ground to ripen. If it's missing or white, your melon is under-ripe. If it's dark yellow, it might be overripe.

A watermelon's stripes are indicators of variety, and there are many variations. Some watermelons don't even have stripes. Stripes do not always indicate ripeness. Some references state that if it's a striped watermelon variety, both the dark and light green stripes will get lighter as the melon ripens. Even on a solid-green watermelon, the overall hue will lighten up a few shades as it ripens.

A watermelon has about 3-4 weeks of shelf life once it has been cut from the vine. A whole watermelon does not need to be refrigerated. It can be stored at room temperature.

If purchasing a cut melon, look for bright red flesh with dark brown or black seeds. An abundance of white seeds means it was picked before its prime if it is the seeded variety. Avoid those with white streaks through the flesh and those pieces where the flesh is mealy, dry, and/or separating from the seeds.

Did you know that you should wash watermelons? Wash all fruits and vegetables in clean, running water before eating them. This will prevent the transfer of any contaminants from the outside of the watermelon to the inside while cutting.

To cut watermelon cubes, start by trimming the top and bottom rind from the watermelon so it can sit flat on the cutting board. Run the knife down the edges to remove the rind, following the curve of the melon. Then trim away any missed white spots. Lay the peeled watermelon on its side and slice the flesh into 1- or 2-inch thick circular slabs. Stack a few slabs and cut them into even cubes.

Watermelon wedges are the quintessential way to serve the fruit. The rind left on makes an easy handle, perfect for grabbing. Start by trimming the rind again to stabilize the melon. Stand the watermelon up on one of the flat sides and run the knife down the center to cut the watermelon in half. Place one half of the melon cut-side down and slice down the center again to make quarters. Cut 1-inch slices across the quartered watermelon to create wedges.

Store cut watermelon in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to five days. Once cut, refrigerate extra watermelon in an airtight container for up to three days.

Consider noshing on this popular summer fruit when the temperature heats up — your taste buds will thank you!

(Sources: www.fda.gov; fdc.nal.usda.gov; www.watermelon.org)

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