

## Get Creative With Cantaloupe

A cantaloupe is a delicious summer melon. Cantaloupe is an orange, juicy summer fruit that's related to the watermelon and honeydew melon.

There are two main cantaloupe varieties: North American and European. Both varieties have orange flesh inside and have a similar taste. The primary difference is the outside pattern on the rind. North American cantaloupe, also known as muskmelon, is round with thin, light brown skin and a net-like covering, while European cantaloupe is oblong with lightly ribbed gray-green skin.

What are the benefits of eating cantaloupe? Cantaloupe benefits your health, providing nutrients your body needs. Cantaloupe contains a variety of vitamins and minerals. They are rich in vitamin A as well as vitamin C and are a good source of the mineral potassium. Cantaloupe, like other melons, has a high water content (about 90%) and is low in calories, fat, and sodium. One cup of cubed cantaloupe contains approximately 55 calories.

Cantaloupes do not ripen after being picked from the vine. While the fruit will soften, it will not become sweeter or juicier. If you are looking for a ripe cantaloupe, you should search for three things:

*Look:* The skin under the netting should be a light orange or cream/yellowish color. Green or gray indicates an unripe fruit. Look at the stem end of the cantaloupe; it will be indented, smooth, and round if it is ripe. Avoid any melon with soft spots or a bruised exterior.

*Feel:* You should be able to feel the edges of the outer skin; smooth skin means it is not ripe. Press the flower or blossom end gently; if it springs back, the cantaloupe will be ready to eat. If it is hard, it's unripe.

*Smell:* Place the flower end of the cantaloupe just under your nose and smell. A sweet, strong aroma indicates the cantaloupe is ready. Don't pick or buy it if it doesn't have a scent. It is not sweet and probably unripe.

Cantaloupes are almost always eaten fresh. Cantaloupe also can be grilled or roasted.

Bacteria is a food safety concern. Washing the exterior of the melon helps to remove any bacteria. It's important to wash the cantaloupe before cutting into it. Wash melons under running tap water before cutting. If desired, a scrub brush can be used on the melon rind. Washing melons with soap is not recommended.

Whole, uncut cantaloupe can be left on the counter for several days, depending on ripeness. Whole, uncut cantaloupe will last 2-3 weeks in the refrigerator.

Discard cut melon if kept at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Refrigerate cut cantaloupe in a clean, air-tight container for up to 5 days.

Cantaloupe is commonly used in appetizers, salads, and desserts.

Here are a few ways to add cantaloupe to your diet:

- Wrap cantaloupe slices with prosciutto for a classic appetizer

- Combine prosciutto, ricotta, and some melon for a perfect crostini
- Make a chilled cantaloupe soup
- Top oatmeal and cereal with roasted cantaloupe
- Put sliced cantaloupe in savory salads
- Create a cantaloupe salsa with a mix of melon, onion, jalapeno, and fresh cilantro
- Stuff cantaloupe halves with cottage cheese
- Add cantaloupe to smoothies and protein shakes
- Make homemade popsicles, sorbet, or ice cream
- Bake cantaloupe quick bread or prepare a cantaloupe pie

Picking the right cantaloupe can impart a beautiful flavor to your dishes. Try experimenting with cantaloupe by adding it to your favorite dishes to boost your fruit intake.