



MELON TALKING POINTS

2. Slice of Melon History

- Ancient Romans and Greeks used melons for medicinal purposes and also prepared it for the gods as a delicacy.
- Iraq, Egypt, Africa – Use melon flesh as a staple food, animal feed, and source of water in some dry regions.
- Asia, India – Roast melon seeds; preserve watermelon by salting or brining.
- Indian tribes and South America – Roast melon seeds; use in ceremonial meals and practices.
- Russia – Use watermelon juice.

History

- The origin of the melon as we know it today is rather shrouded in mystery. Of a surety, they originated in Asia and Africa rather than in the US, and brought to England around the sixteenth century AD.
- Melons were first introduced to the New World by Columbus during his second expedition. They were part of rations aboard the ships to help prevent scurvy in sailors. Scurvy is a disease due to a lack in vitamin C, that results in sores on the body and bleeding. Once his men had eaten them and discarded the seeds, the crop quickly took hold in Haiti and spread from there.
- Seeds were also brought to California by Spanish Conquistadors. Navajos were farming the fruit by the 1800s, from seeds brought from Latin America. However, melons did not gain prominence as a common food until it was brought again during the slave trade.
- Melons are a highly nutritious food. It has been touted for centuries that they have numerous medicinal properties. The seeds of cantaloupe were used in China to moderate fevers and the digestive system.

Elsewhere, seeds were pulverized and used to treat tuberculosis.

Cantaloupes are particularly beneficial to people with heart disease, as they contain large of amounts of an anticoagulant known as adenosine.

- They also contain high levels of potassium, which benefits those with high blood pressure. Due to their high water content, all melons are considered diuretics.
- Member of the gourd and pumpkin family, melons are notoriously “promiscuous,” meaning that they must be kept separate from other melons due to the fact that they readily pollinate each other. They are not particularly hardy, nor are they very frail.
- They require about four months of warm weather, and like lots of direct sunlight. Unlike some vegetables, indoor germination with plans to transplant outside does not work well. Melons simply will not grow well that way. For best results, seeding them outdoors in early May works very well.
- Since they are a vine fruit, they require lots of space to spread out; some dwarf or midget varieties can do well in planters, such as large truck tires. No matter how you plant them, melons must be kept warm. If the temperatures drop below fifty regularly, the result will be small, bitter fruit.
- Two other requirements are fertile soil and lots of water. Good dirt is imperative to grow melons. These fruits also require copious amounts of water. However, as fruits grow nearer to harvest, it is recommended to cease watering for one week prior to picking. This will allow the sugars to develop.

- Honeydew melons are very ancient in origin. They have a pale yellow to white skin and have a pale green to green flesh. They are available all year round but are at their best in January and February. It is not certain where honeydew melons originated, but it was somewhere in the East near Persia. Marco Polo discovered that the Persians cut melons in thin strips and dried them much as raisins are dried, concentrating their flavor and making a marketable treat.
- Dried and roasted melon seed are a popular snack throughout the Middle East.

3. & 4. How Do Melons Grow?

- Melons are a warm-weather annual plant sensitive to cold temperatures at any stage of growth. In fact, seeded melons germinate best under hotter temperatures, up to 95 F, and can tolerate temperatures in excess of 100 F. In California, melons go to market beginning in May with a continuous supply through October, peaking in July and August.
- Melons grow best when planted on raised beds spaced every 12 inches, in rows spaced four to six feet apart. Due to their large size, melons are normally hand-harvested when ripe at the “full-slip” stage, when the fruit easily separates from the vine with slight pressure.
- Melons are vine-like herb plants of the Cucurbit family that bear an accessory fruit known as a false berry. The fruit is actually called *muskmelon* because of its odor when ripe, but over the years this has been shortened to *melon*.
- The watermelon also belongs to the Cucurbit family, but is classified in

the genus *Citrullus*. Therefore, it is only loosely considered a type of melon. There are numerous melon cultivars, but commercially the most common are the cantaloupe (Cantalupensis and Reticulatus Groups) and the honeydew (Inodorus Group).

5. Why should we eat melons?

- One serving of melons may provide:
- An excellent source of Vitamin C (e.g., cantaloupe and honeydew).
- An excellent source of Vitamin A (e.g., cantaloupe).
- A source of Vitamin B6, folate and niacin (e.g., cantaloupe and honeydew).
- A source of lycopene (e.g., watermelon). Due to the red color.
- A source of potassium (e.g., cantaloupe, casaba, honeydew, watermelon).
 - **Potassium is an essential mineral that functions primarily in the intracellular fluid by regulating electrolyte and water balance and cell metabolism. It also plays a role in the synthesis of muscle protein from amino acids in the blood.**



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 - **Eat Your Colors**
 - Fruits and vegetables come in a rainbow of colors. Eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables every day — red, yellow/orange, white, green and blue/purple. These may lower the risk of some cancers. Melons are found in the red, yellow/orange and green color groups.
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Color Group ▪ Red ▪ Yellow/Orange ▪ Green | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health Benefits ▪ Help maintain heart health, memory function and urinary tract health ▪ Help maintain heart health, vision health and healthy immune system ▪ Help maintain vision health and strong bones and teeth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Melon Examples ▪ Watermelon ▪ Cantaloupe, casaba, piel de sapo, sugar melon, yellow watermelon ▪ Honeydew, Crenshaw, horned melon, galia |
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6. How do you pick a good Melon?

- Select cantaloupes with a sweet, fragrant smell and soft dent on stem.
- Select honeydew and watermelons that feel heavy for size and sound hollow when tapped on rind.
- Avoid melons with shriveled, punctured or cracked rinds.
- Store whole melons on counter and eat within two days.
- Wash melons before cutting. Remove pulp from rind and discard seeds. Refrigerate cut melons in sealed container. Use within three days.
- Honeydew melons are rich in vitamin C and are most flavorful if eaten at room temperature. Contrary to what one may expect, the honeydew is ripe when the skin is green. A yellow skin is an indication the melon is not yet ripe. Unripened honeydew melons may be kept stored in a paper bag at room temperature for 2 or 3 days to promote ripening.
- Ripe honeydews will keep for up to 5 days if they are carefully wrapped in plastic. If you are not familiar with the characteristics of ripe melons stored

in the refrigerator, you may soon learn that the melon will flavor everything in the refrigerator. It is somewhat disconcerting to expect a cool drink of fresh water, only to discover that it tastes like melon.

Just the Facts

- On average, it takes about 10 to 15 bee visits for proper pollination to grow melons.
- By weight, the watermelon is the most common melon consumed in America, followed by the cantaloupe and honeydew melon.
- There are many varieties of the “western shipping type” cantaloupe, but since consumers cannot differentiate between them, they are marketed under the general name as “cantaloupe.”
- There are four main varieties of watermelon: allsweet, ice-box, seedless and yellow flesh.

Helping Your Child Eat Healthy

- Slice and eat melons as a refreshing snack or side dish at meals.
- Serve sliced or chopped melons with low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese.
- Scoop fruit into melon balls.
- Freeze melon balls and enjoy as cold snacks on hot days.

- Add a colorful variety of melons to meals to help maintain good vision and strengthen the immune system.