



Your nose knows ripe cantaloupe

How can you tell if cantaloupe is ripe? I love it but rarely buy it because I'm never sure if it's good or not.

With cantaloupe, experts say, it's all in the nose of the beholder. And now is a good time to put your sniffer to the test.

First, some selection hints: Ripe cantaloupes have a sweet, musky aroma. Watch out for any with an overly strong odor — they could be overripe. Avoid melons with soft spots, bruises or punctures. Don't worry if there's a "bleached" side where the melon rested on the ground. The melon should feel heavy for its size.

The blossom end (opposite of the stem end) should yield gently to the thumb. The stem end should have no stem remaining and should have a smooth depression (known as a full slip). Under-ripe melons do not pull cleanly from the vine and leave a depression with a rough edge (known as a partial slip).

Cantaloupes should have a prominent, evenly distributed corky "netting" on their skin. Different varieties will have either a buff or light tan netting with a green, yellow or gray background.

If a cantaloupe is picked before it is fully ripened, it won't become any sweeter afterwards. Like other melons, cantaloupes don't have a reserve of starch that can be converted to sugars after being picked. But harvested melons do become

softer and juicier with time, especially if stored at room temperature. Keep all of this in mind as you begin your perfect cantaloupe hunt.

And this is a great time of year to do so, because fresh cantaloupe is readily available and usually inexpensive. If you get a few duds as you sharpen your melon-selection skills, it literally should be a small price to pay.

And the benefits are big. A half-cup of cubed cantaloupe — or a little more than one-eighth of a medium-sized melon — gives you 135 micrograms of vitamin A, nearly 30 milligrams of vitamin C, and more than 200 milligrams of potassium — all for 27 calories. You can't ask for a much more nutrient-dense food than cantaloupe.

Careful when serving, though. Be sure to rinse the rind thoroughly just before cutting into cantaloupe or any other melon. After all, the fruit does grow along the ground, and a particle of dirt could carry bacteria that your knife would introduce to the fruit you'll soon be eating. And if you stop to think about all those other people who may have sniffed your nice, ripe cantaloupe before you did, rinsing seems like an even better idea.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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By Martha Filipic
(614) 292-9833
filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Sharron Coplin, registered dietitian and Ohio State University Extension associate in the Department of Human Nutrition, College of Human Ecology.

To receive Chow Line electronically, send an e-mail to filipic.3@osu.edu or sign up to our news subscription service at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php>.

**Section of Communications
and Technology
News and Media Relations**
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
(330) 263-3780

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