



Seeded or seedless, watermelon a treat

Are seedless watermelons less sweet than seeded varieties?

Actually, the opposite is usually true: Because seedless types do not expend energy to produce seeds, the flesh is often sweeter than what you find in normal varieties.

Other factors do affect how sweet that slice of watermelon will end up. Higher-than-normal rainfall (especially near harvest), wilting vines and cool temperatures all can contribute to less sugar development even in fully ripened watermelons. Unfortunately, sometimes it's just the luck of the draw that determines whether you get a deliciously sweet, succulent watermelon, or one with a mere shadow of the flavor you're expecting.

However, there are some clues you can use to increase your odds:

- Lift it: Ripe melons should feel heavy for their size.
- For uncut melons, thump the rind with your fist. If you hear a resonant, solid and dull sound, the melon is ripe. A light metallic ring indicates the melon was picked too early. If you grow watermelon in your garden, you can use this method to determine when melons are ripe for the picking. In addition, check the curly tendrils on the vine closest to the watermelon. When the fruit is mature, they turn brown and dry out.

- Ripe melons will develop a golden or creamy yellow spot on the side that rests on the ground. If the spot is white or green, the melon was picked too soon.

Interestingly, seedless watermel-

ons must be grown alongside seeded varieties. The seedless varieties are sterile and produce little pollen. Their blossoms must rely on the pollen from seeded types growing nearby to germinate into fruit. Growers make sure the rinds of the two types look different, so they can easily tell at harvest which are seedless and which aren't.

Store uncut watermelon at room temperature. Last year, researchers reported in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* that the lycopene content of watermelons stored at 70 degrees for two weeks increased by as much as 40 percent in some types over watermelons stored in cooler temperatures. Lycopene, found in lower amounts in tomatoes and some other fruits and vegetables, is a powerful antioxidant linked with various health benefits.

However, once the melon is cut, it should be stored in the refrigerator. And before you slice into the melon, the Food and Drug Administration recommends cleaning the rind with a clean produce brush to wash away any bacteria on the outside of the fruit, to keep it from contaminating the flesh. Drying it with a clean cloth or paper towel is also helpful.

One cup of diced watermelon has only 46 calories and gives you 1 gram of fiber, and is a good source of vitamins A and C.

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@cfaes.osu.edu.



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