

Wherever you live, it would be fun to try growing melons. At the very least, you will probably see the flowers that form and perhaps even get to watch the melons themselves form. And if you are very, very fortunate, a sweet taste of homegrown melon may be yours.



A CANTALOUPE GROWING IN A HOME GARDEN

Agricultural facts

Watermelon ranked 40th in 2007 among Oregon top crops.

The Blacktail Mountain watermelon was developed in northern Idaho, where summer nights are cold and the growing season is short. This melon takes 76 days to maturity.

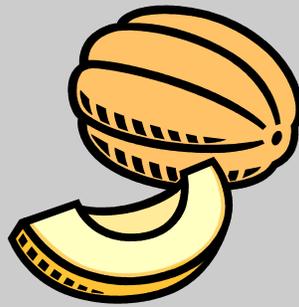
Thirty farmers in Washington State grew cantaloupe on a total of 300 acres in 2007.

In Montana, bears looking for tasty treats need to be kept away from melon patches.

Portland mayor's annual tailgate party

Watermelons and cantaloupe from Hermiston, Ore., are distributed free in downtown Portland, Ore., one day each summer. The tradition began when the mayors of the two cities met at a conference in 1990 and became friends.

This year on August 5 it took about half an hour to distribute five tons of Hermiston-grown produce to lucky Portland residents.



Cantaloupe Salsa

Try to use locally grown melons and garlic in this refreshing salsa. For more information on garlic, see *The Growing Gardener* at yummynorthwest.com/growing/growing.html.

3/4 cup coarsely chopped cantaloupe
1/4 cup chopped onion
2 garlic cloves minced
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
2 teaspoon olive oil
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
1 teaspoon minced seeded jalapeno pepper

Mix ingredients together in a bowl. Let sit for at least 15 minutes to allow flavors blend.

Makes about 1 cup.

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When one has tasted a watermelon, he knows what the angels eat.

— Mark Twain

Heirlooms: short and sweet

Generally, you will see the same melon varieties available in supermarkets. But there are many heirloom varieties of melons that might look odd but tend to taste sweeter than modern varieties.

These heirlooms also can have a relatively short growing season, which helps in climates that don't measure up to the long span of hot weather that modern melons thrive in.

Here are a few heirlooms with interesting names that take about 80 days to maturity.

Cantaloupe: Collective Farm Woman, Eden's Gem, Hearts of Gold.

Watermelon: Cream of Saskatchewan, Sugar Baby, Sweet Princess. Moon and Stars takes about 95 days to maturity but promises a "moon and stars" pattern on its rind and leaves.

Caution

Because the skin can be covered with harmful bacteria, it is a good idea to wash melons before cutting them.

Earlier this year, cantaloupes imported from Honduras were implicated in illness caused by salmonella in 16 states, including Oregon and Washington.

Buying local fruit and knowing the farmer who grows it considerably lessens the risk of getting contaminated produce.



About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest and Montana.

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