

## CANTALOUPE



In 2009, melon growers in Yuma County produced spring melons on roughly 5,200 acres valued at over \$4.6 million. The region has two growing seasons with the bulk of production occurring in the spring. About 1000 acres of cantaloupe are grown as a fall crop.

Cantaloupe comes with its own serving bowl. You can cut them in half through the middle and scoop out each half with a spoon.

It is hard to believe, but the great taste of a juicy sweet cantaloupe comes with a very small caloric price: only 50 calories per 6-oz. slice.

The true "cantaloupe" (*Cucumis cantalupensis*) from Cantalupo, Italy, is actually a hard-shelled melon that is not grown much outside the Mediterranean countries. It's actually muskmelons--with their soft rinds and netted surface markings--that are so popular worldwide.

Leaving an uncut cantaloupe at room temperature for two to four days makes the fruit softer and juicier.

One serving (1/4 of a medium melon) provides more than 400 percent of your daily vitamin A, and it also provides nearly 100 percent of your daily vitamin C.

The longer a cantaloupe stays on the vine, the sweeter the flavor.

Good-quality Cantaloupe will have large webbing or netting on the skin, will have yellow/orange coloring and be slightly soft on the stem end (firm elsewhere). They will also have a good cantaloupe smell on the stem end, and the scar at the stem end should be a smooth and well-rounded cavity. Finally, you can hear the seeds rattle inside a juicy melon when shaken.

Avoid cantaloupes with a rough stem end or with portions of the stem remaining - this means the melon was harvested too early and not at the peak of sweetness. Melons with green coloring, soft or sunken spots or dark and dirty spots that look moldy are all signs of poor quality.

For perfect flavor, let a cantaloupe sit at room temperature (not in the window) until it is ripe. If you like your cantaloupe cold, put it into the refrigerator after it has ripened.

What Americans call cantaloupes are actually muskmelons. True cantaloupes are not netted, have smooth to rough skin and are not commercially grown in the United States. Europeans recognize a clear distinction between cantaloupes and muskmelons.

Cantaloupes are harvested by maturity and not by size. Cantaloupes ripen after harvest but do not increase in sugar content

Cantaloupe is grown in soil, so you may see a slightly whitened area on one side of the cantaloupe. This does not affect the quality of the melon.

The aroma of the cantaloupe should have a sweet smell about it, especially around the stem area.

Cantaloupe has been around since ancient Roman times about 2400 BC. Brought to the New World on one of Columbus's voyages in seed form, he later reported seeing it cultivated by the Indians.

Commercial production of cantaloupe in the U.S. began in the mid-1800's.

It is hard to believe, but the great taste of a juicy sweet cantaloupe comes with a very small caloric price: only 50 calories per 6-oz. slice.

Add cantaloupe cubes or balls to fruit salads or serve small cantaloupe wedges as an edible garnish for breakfast, lunch or dinner entrees.

Whole, ripe cantaloupe should be stored in the refrigerator and use within a week of purchase. Cut fruit should be eaten in one or two days.

Cantaloupes have significant amounts of Vitamins A and C, are a good source of potassium, and contain small amounts of many other minerals. The rind is rich in nutrients so the whole melon may be juiced.

Cut melons are aromatic and their smell will penetrate other foods.

Try a squeeze of lemon or lime juice to enhance the flavor of a cantaloupe.

Cantaloupe production varies and ranges from 500 to 900 cartons per acre. This is equivalent to 20,000 to 36,000 pounds per acre.

Since the eastern soils and climate of North America weren't well suited for cantaloupes, commercial production eventually moved into the western states, and today most of the cantaloupes produced in the U.S. are grown in Arizona and California.

Cantaloupes prefer loam or clay-loam soils and are planted on beds that are raised so when irrigation water is applied, only the plant roots get the water and the surface of the bed remains dry. This keeps the cantaloupes from contact with moist soil, which can result in cosmetic blemishes. Raised production also protects cantaloupes against decay and other microorganisms.

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