WATERMELON

At the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, Oklahoma exhibited three watermelons with the combined weight of 334 pounds.

In 2009, melon producers in Yuma County grew over 1,000 acres of watermelons valued at over $7.6 million. Yuma County is the leading producer of watermelons in the state.

About a half-century ago, all watermelons were round. They were hard to stack and tended to roll around during the rough ride from farm to market. Since they were also soft, they were prone to cracking and bruising as they bumped together. Fred Andrus, an agricultural researcher, developed the first sweet melon that could be stacked, because it was shaped like an oval and was named, “oblong.” Today most watermelons are oblong.

Watermelon (Citrullus lanatus) are native to the Kalahari desert of Southern Africa.

The first record of watermelon harvest is found in Egyptian hieroglyphics on tomb walls dating back 5000 years. Watermelons were left as food to nourish the dearly departed in the afterlife.

A watermelon was once thrown at Roman Governor Demosthenes during a political debate. Placing the watermelon upon his head, he thanked the thrower for providing him with a helmet to wear as he fought Philip of Macedonia.

Watermelon crossed the Atlantic Ocean and made its way to North America with African slaves.

Watermelon does not contain any fat or cholesterol and is an excellent source of vitamins A, B6 and C, and contains fiber, potassium and lycopene.

Scientists have found that watermelon contains more of the health-promoting compound lycopene per serving than any other fresh fruit or vegetable. Lycopene gives watermelon and tomatoes their red color and is thought to act as a powerful antioxidant that may help to reduce the risk of age-related diseases.

Every part of the watermelon is edible, even the seeds and rinds.

During the Civil War the Confederate Army boiled down watermelons as a source of sugar and molasses.

Watermelon is 92% water. Early explorers used them as canteens.

Most watermelons weigh from 5 - 50 pounds, but some weigh as much as 100 pounds.

Because watermelons are rather fragile, they cannot be harvested by machine. Instead workers carefully toss them in a relay from field to truck.

Watermelon is grown in over 96 countries worldwide.

Watermelon snow is a unique phenomenon where snow appears pink or red and has a distinctive watermelon scent. It is common to the Sierra Nevada mountain range in California in the summer months at altitudes of 10,000 to 12,000 feet. The pink snow is caused by an algae which thrives in very cold temperatures.
Select watermelons with a firm, symmetrical watermelon that is free of bruises, cuts and dents. Lift it up - a watermelon should be heavy for its size. Watermelons are mostly water, which accounts for most of its weight. Turn it over - on the underside of the watermelon there should be a creamy yellow spot from where it sat on the ground and ripened in the sun.

Throughout the years, watermelon has found itself in many pickles, jams, and other interesting situations.

In China and Japan watermelon is a popular gift to bring a host.

In Israel and Egypt, the sweet taste of watermelon is often paired with the salty taste of feta cheese.

Watermelon’s official name is *Citrullus lanatus* of the botanical family Curcurbitaceae and is related to cucumbers, pumpkins and squash.

By weight, watermelon is the most-consumed melon in the U.S., followed by cantaloupe and honeydew.

The first cookbook published in the United States in 1796 contained a recipe for watermelon rind pickles.

In 1990, Bill Carson, of Arrington, Tennessee, grew the largest watermelon at 262 pounds that is still on the record books according to the 1998 edition of the Guinness Book of World Records.

In 1999 over 4 billion pounds of watermelon were produced in the United States.

Watermelon is an ideal health food because it doesn't contain any fat or cholesterol, and is an excellent source of vitamins A, B6 and C.

Contrary to popular belief eating watermelon seeds does not cause a watermelon to grow in your stomach. Actually, in some cultures it is popular to bake the seeds and then eat them.

Over 1,200 varieties of watermelon are grown worldwide.

The word "watermelon" first appeared in the English dictionary in 1615.

Watermelons are harvested at full maturity as they typically do not develop in internal color or increase in sugars after being removed from the vine. The ground spot (the portion of the melon resting on the soil) changes from pale white to a creamy yellow at proper maturity.

Fresh watermelon may be eaten in a variety of ways and is also often used to flavor summer drinks and smoothies.

Grilled watermelon, known as watermelon steak due to its visual similarity to raw steak, has started to become a popular item in some restaurants.

The comedian, Leo Gallagher, is famous for smashing watermelons (and other items) with an over-sized sledgehammer at the end of his performances, frequently showering his audiences with watermelon juice and pulp.

The Oklahoma State Senate passed a bill on April 17, 2007 declaring watermelon as the official state vegetable.
Although so-called "seedless" watermelons have far fewer seeds than the seeded varieties, they generally contain at least a few soft, pale seeds.

Seedless watermelons are the product of two plant varieties; that of the seedless plant itself (recognizable because the seed is larger), and a plant which is needed to pollinate it. Unless both plant types are grown in the same vicinity, no seedless fruit will result. This system for growing seedless watermelons was first developed by Dr. Kihara in Japan and subsequently improved by Dr. O J Eigsti in 1948.

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