Friday’s Feature
By
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How to choose the best watermelon

One of the best ways to celebrate summer is to enjoy sweet, ripe watermelons. But knowing when to harvest or buying the best one is not always an easy chore. Of all the hard-to-choose fruits, watermelon is one of the toughest to select. The hard rind of a watermelon can be up to an inch thick and doesn't soften as it ripens. It's green when ripe and green when unripe. So, how do you select a juicy, sweet watermelon?

Your best bet is to grow your own or buy local and "in season", through mid-July. Collin Adcock, Extension Agent in Washington County, provides us some tips on how to know when to harvest watermelons from your garden.

Choosing a ripe watermelon from the field or garden can be much easier than choosing a ripe one in the store. The ability to recognize a ripe melon comes from years of experience and careful observation. In the garden there are several clues to help determine the ripeness of a melon that one does not always have in the store.

Most people rely on four methods of determining melon ripeness in the field.

First, look at the tendril or “pigtail” closest to the melon. When this tendril turns brown and dries out, it is a good sign that the melon is ripe.

Next, look at the bottom of the melon where it lays on the ground. When this area, sometimes referred to as the "color spot", turns from white to a light yellow, there is a good chance the watermelon is ripe.

Then look at the rind. When the rind becomes rough to the touch and turns from a more shiny color to a more dull color and is resistant to penetration by the thumbnail it is a sign of melon ripeness.

The last method is the thump test. This is done by thumping the top of the melon. If the watermelon has a dull thud when thumped, it is very possible the melon is ripe. Unripe melons will usually have a tighter, ringing or hollow sound. Be careful when using this test because it is not always reliable. Watermelons do not always give off a dull thud when ripe. For some watermelons a dull thud may indicate an over-ripe melon.
Only a melon’s taste can provide definitive proof as to its ripeness. A foolproof approach is to cut open several melons that appear to be ripe (based on the above methods), and then taste all of the melons and decide which one has the best taste. After locating the best tasting watermelon note the condition of the closest tendril, the color spot, how the thump sounds, and the shine of the rind along with melon size. Harvest all those that have similar characteristics.

When buying a watermelon, you should look for "a firm, symmetrical watermelon that is free of bruises, cuts or dents" according to the National Watermelon Promotion Board.

When you see a nice-looking watermelon, pick it up and feel its heft; then pick up a few others of similar size to compare. At 92 percent water, a good melon should feel heavy for its size.

How do you know a watermelon ripened on the vine? Easy, turn the melon over and check for a creamy yellow spot. That’s a sign that the watermelon sat on the ground and in the sun to ripen. The yellow spot is the only place the sun didn’t hit.

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