

WATERMELON

Citrullus lanatus

Cucurbitaceae Gourd

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

The writings of Dr. David Livingston, medical missionary and explorer of Africa during the mid 1800's, report that he saw Watermelon growing in semi-desert districts of that country. Earlier records prove that it had been a part of people's diet for 4,000 years. Watermelon is a vine fruit with male and female blossoms on the same plant, pollinated by bees. It is known for its oblong shape, large size, 11-18 kg. (25-40 lbs.) and deep green skin. Recently smaller sizes and round shapes have been developed; even square ones for convenient shipping. Watermelon has sweet, grainy red or yellow flesh all the way through, with seeds not confined to a central cavity but distributed through the flesh. The flesh has a very high water content and is a source of liquid for people during droughts. Over 1,200 varieties of Watermelon are grown worldwide. Every part of a Watermelon is edible, even the seeds and rinds. Some varieties are grown strictly for the seed that they produce and their flesh is bitter. Some, grown for cattle fodder, have flesh that is white and dry.

Cultivation

Watermelon is a warm weather crop that can withstand drought and high temperatures. Mulch should be pulled back early in the planting season to warm the soil and protect the seedlings. It is best to put manure into the bottom of a hole, mix the remaining soil in with the manure and water the planted seeds well. Cantaloupe seeds can be planted in a ring around Watermelon to shade the Watermelon stems, especially at their base. Some hybrid triploid varieties are seedless and have to be planted with seeded varieties to insure pollination.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Watermelons are ready to pick when the surface on the under side turns from greenish-white, to yellow and then to cream. Leaves nearest the fruit will also turn brown. It is common for the plant to produce excess blossoms which fall off. Immature fruit is not as sweet as it should be and overripe fruit is mealy and watery. Cut the Watermelon off the stem do not pull it. When the fruit is ripe for eating, the seeds are also mature. Seeds may be saved by cleaning the flesh from the brown or black seeds, drying the seeds thoroughly and storing them in a closed container for up to 5 years.

Pests and Diseases

Watermelon is hardier than cucumbers or other melons but it is wise to plant fusarium wilt resistant seeds when available. Excessive damage from some diseases can be prevented by use of an all-purpose mixture of 1 gallon (3.8 L) of water, combined with a medium spoonful of baking soda, a drop of liquid dish soap and a drop of mineral oil sprayed on both sides of the leaves, every 3-4 days.

Cooking and Nutrition

Its ease of preparation and serving makes Watermelon a favorite warm weather food. It contains a high level of lycopene (higher than tomatoes), an antioxidant that may protect against cancer and heart disease. It is also high in vitamin A, B-6, C, folic acid and fiber. In some cultures it is popular to bake the seeds and eat them as a snack. The rinds can be candied or pickled. . Fresh uncut Watermelon can be stored at room temperature for two weeks