

Consuming Thoughts

by

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Watermelon

Easy-to-serve watermelon has been around for a long time but it's still as up-to-date as any convenience food you'll find in a modern market.

Watermelon culture goes back to prehistoric times. There are pictures or drawings by the ancient Egyptians that show they raised watermelons.

For centuries it was believed that watermelons came from Asia, but no evidence has been found that they ever grew wild.

About 100 years ago, the great missionary-explorer, David Livingstone, settled the question of origin when he found large tracts in Central Africa literally covered with watermelons growing wild.

Watermelons were introduced into this country by the early set-

tlers. Over the years there have been considerable changes in varieties. For example, of the 20 or so popular varieties grown for the market as late as 1950, only two or three are still considered important. Newer varieties that are more resistant to disease, ship better and taste better are being developed for today's market.

The leading types of watermelon are the round, dark green or the long, light green and the long, light and dark green-striped variety. Popular seeded varieties grown in Southeast Pennsylvania include: Sugar Baby, Crimson Sweet, Sangria, and New Queen. There are also two yellow-fleshed varieties called Yellow Baby and Golden Crown. Seedless varieties such as Millionaire, Honey Heart

and Sweetheart hybrid are also very popular.

To select a ripe, juicy melon look for one that's symmetrical in shape, fresh and attractive in appearance and of good color for the variety. A melon that has a pointed end generally isn't mature and won't be very sweet tasting. A mature melon has bloom over the surface of the rind, giving it a velvety appearance, but too often the bloom gets rubbed off in handling and moving. A fully ripe watermelon has a thin outer skin that peels easily when scraped with the fingernail. But, it's not a good practice to go around leaving unsightly scratch marks on melons you don't decide to buy.

Another good guide to choos-

ing a ripe, juicy melon is to look at the underside or belly of the melon that laid on the ground. This ground color changes from white to creamy white or yellow tinge with maturity.

Some people thump or slap a watermelon. Generally, this is too vague a test to be used by an amateur. The thump test is often used at harvest time in the field by a skilled person who knows what sound to expect from a particular variety. If you want to try your skill, an immature melon gives a metallic ringing sound while a mature melon gives a

more muffled or dead sound. The only trouble is that an overripe melon gives the same dull sound, so this method of testing has its limitations.

Selecting ripe, sweet tasting melons has been made considerably easier with the trend toward selling cut pieces. Choose a cut piece with a full red color across the surface.

Light color or streaks of white indicate immaturity. Seeds should be black or dark brown for full ripeness, not white. For best taste there should be no cracks or hollows.

Pa. Gardener Selects Picks 'Tidal Wave Cherry'

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Penn State Master Gardeners have chosen "Tidal Wave Cherry" as the Pennsylvania Gardener Selects Plant of the Year for 2002.

This petunia was selected from among the 22 flowering annuals in the evaluation program as the best-performing plant in the 44 Gardener Selects gardens across Pennsylvania.

"The Master Gardener evaluators found this plant truly outstanding in both 2001, when it shared the plant of the year award with Angelonia 'Angel Mist Purple Stripe,' and this year when it stood out as the single most highly rated plant," said Robert Berghage, associate professor of horticulture. The plant of the year in 2000 was the petunia "Misty Lilac Wave."

Pennsylvania Gardener Selects is an educational and plant promotion program of the Horticulture Trial Gardens in the College of Agricultural Sciences. It is sponsored by the Master Garden-

er program, the Pennsylvania Floral Industry Association, the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture marketing program.

Gardener Select plants for 2002 are listed below. "Each of these plants grew and flowered well in the evaluation gardens and is an excellent choice for home gardens and commercial plantings across the commonwealth," said Berghage.

Annuals: Argyranthemum "Butterfly," French Marigold "Bonanza Bolero," Ornamental Pepper "Super Chili," Petunia "Purple Wave," Petunia "Pink Wave," Petunia "Kahuna Violet," Rudbeckia "Indian Summer," farinacea Signum Verbena "Aztec Dark Lavender," Verbena "Tapien Blue Violet" and Zinnia "Profusion Orange."

Perennials: Echinacea purpurea "Magnus," Perovskia atriplicifolia "Russian sage," and Rudbeckia fulgida "Goldsturm."

Hospice Of Lancaster County Will Host Annual Labor Day Auction

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Plans are well under way for the 18th Annual Hospice of Lancaster County Annual Labor Day Auction on Saturday, Aug. 31, from 3 p.m.-8 p.m., and on Monday, Sept. 2, from 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m. at the Lampeter Fairgrounds, one mile south of Lancaster.

This year's auction, presented by Turkey Hill Dairy and sponsored by Benchmark Construction and Kunzler and Company, will once again feature a wide range of items donated by area businesses and individuals. Some of the many items on the auction block will include handcrafted Amish furniture, quilts, artwork,

jewelry, home and garden items, household items, sporting goods and tickets, celebrity photos, plants, gift certificates, and a variety of crafts. Great food and fun activities for children will also be available.

Proceeds from the event help Hospice of Lancaster County provide hospice care and bereavement support programs to patients and their families coping with serious illness and loss.

Don't forget to bring your lawn chairs. Visa and Mastercard are accepted. For more information, call (717) 295-3900 or visit the Web at www.hospice-oflanaster.org.

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