

# On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



pre-cut sections. What you see is really what you get. No more holding your breath as you slit the melon with a knife, hoping that the center is bright red, crisp, and sweet.

We both love watermelon, from breakfast fruit to lunch dessert to nighttime snacks, and can polish off a good-sized one in a couple of days of hot weather. Visiting, hungry grandchildren help make them vanish even faster. So whole watermelons still arrive in our kitchen regularly when in seasonal abundance. And, we usually have pretty good luck with the "knock, knock" test, thumping melons until one answers with a sort of hollow, resonant echo sound.

Up until this year, that is. Maybe it's been the weather, chilly for so long, then brutally humid, but lacking bright sunshine. Maybe the choicest melons are sliced for in-store sale by section, for fruit plates and fruit salad mixes.

Whatever the reason, our daughter and I have lamented together for weeks about this season's mediocre watermelon quality. And the stalks growing in the garden have been so slow that

only now does it look like they might actually deliver mature fruit.

High hopes for one nice, large melon purchased recently at a local supermarket crashed when The Farmer sliced into it on the kitchen counter. The inside was already way beyond ripe, (closer to rotting) and sticky juice ran all over the counter and the floor. He mopped the mess up as best he could at the time and warned me about the leaky melon residue. I mopped up the stickiness a second round.

The overripe melon went back the next day for a replacement instantly given. But it took an inconvenient second trip to get it.

And, the irritating scenario was repeated on my next melon purchase a week or two later, this time purchased at a major dis-

counter's produce section. Slicing this time revealed a melon center barely pink-colored. A refund has been promised on my next visit.

"Enough!" I declared.

My latest melon purchase was by far the season's best: right off the stand of a local produce market nearby. Picked fresh from their fields, it was priced more reasonably than either of the rejects and the quality was superb.

We truly live in a world market and are blessed with a bounty of food from near and far. We can enjoy fresh fruits and veggies months out of season and exotic tastes which simply can't be homegrown. So, when it comes to food shopping, there's nothing wrong with thinking global.

But for best freshness, taste, and quality, whenever possible, I'll buy local.

Frustrated? Yep. Irritated? Yep. Disgusted? You betcha'.

All over the melon-cholic I've been battling lately.

Reason for this grumbling — and bad spelling — lies in a couple of bad experiences lately with one of our favorite summertime treats. Watermelons.

Gone are the days, pretty much, when watermelons were a special summertime treat, served up for family festive or holiday occasions. Summertime picnics, like the classic gatherings of family and friends that will take place this Labor Day weekend, were, and still are, an ideal setting for enjoying the special treat of a crisp, cold, tasty watermelon.

And the perfect place to keep a big, ole' watermelon cold, crisp and ready for juice-down-the-chin pleasure was the springhouse, where the big green striped fruit could be floated in icy-cold water, kept fresh and chilled until slicing time.

Most of that has changed these days. Few folks, except some of us farm/old house types, have access to springhouses. Families are smaller and refrigerators offer limited space for reunion-sized dessert fruits. So, watermelon is more frequently purchased these days in pre-cut sections, attractively nestled in icy beds on retail produce displays.

The mystique of a melon purchase is pretty much gone with

## Penn State Opens Venison Workshop To Hunters

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Time was when every deer hunter was taught how to butcher a deer, process the meat and prepare a variety of tasty venison dishes. But these days, it sometimes seems like that vital information is not passed down.

So Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences is opening its Sept. 10 Venison 101 Workshop — which has been offered to extension educators the past three years — to the public. "It's a one-day, intensive hands-on program designed for hunters or family members who have an interest in expanding their knowledge of deer diseases, processing venison, and preparing venison for friends and family," said Cathy Cutter, assistant professor of food science.

The workshop, which will run from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Penn State Meats Lab near Bea-

ver Stadium on the University Park campus, begins with an evaluation of deer diseases (including chronic wasting disease), followed by proper field dressing, an opportunity for hands-on processing, and cooking/canning demonstrations. Participants will be able to taste venison products and interact with speakers.

The deadline to register for the Venison 101 Workshop is Sept. 3. The cost of \$100 per person includes educational materials, lunch, breaks, venison and door prizes.

To register or to get more information about the Venison 101 Workshop, visit the Web at <http://foodsafety.cas.psu.edu/PDFs/venison101.pdf> or contact Cathy Cutter by phone at (814) 865-8862 or by e-mail at [cnc3@psu.edu](mailto:cnc3@psu.edu).

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