

# Agriculture Adventures for Families

This time of year you can find watermelons at the grocery store, the farmer’s market’s and even in backyards! Cook County was once named the Watermelon Capital of the World (in the 1930’s), although that was Cook County in Georgia. The honors now go to Florida, the top producing watermelon state. Chop it, grill it, blend it, just make sure to enjoy your watermelon this season!



## Types of Watermelon

### Seedless: *Queen of Hearts, Crimson, Trio, Millionaire*



Seedless watermelons were created in the 1990’s for those of you who don’t think spitting melon seed is fun. Successive breeding has at last created a melon that is just as sweet as seeded varieties; however, it has not greatly improved low seed germination.

### Picnic: *Charleston Gray, Black Diamond, Crimson Sweet*

Another watermelon type, the Picnic, tends to be larger, from 16-45 pounds (7-20 kg.) or more, perfect for a picnic gathering. These are the traditional oblong or round melons with a green rind and sweet, red flesh – which mature at around 85 days or so.



### Icebox: *Sugar Baby, Tiger Baby*



Icebox watermelons are bred to feed one person or a small family and, as such, are much smaller than their counterparts at 5-15 pounds (2-7 kg.). Watermelon plant varieties in this genre include the Sugar Baby and the Tiger Baby. Sugar Babies are sweet pulped with dark green rinds and were first introduced in 1956, while Tiger Babies are golden once mature in about 75 days.

### Yellow/Orange: *Desert King, Tendergold, Yellow Baby*

Lastly, we come to yellow/orange fleshed watermelon plant varieties, which are typically round and can be both seedless and seeded.



Source: [www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/fruits/watermelon/types-of-watermelon.htm](http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/fruits/watermelon/types-of-watermelon.htm)

## Melon Fun Facts

*Juicy, ripe melons are a staple of summer. Whether you’re craving a pretty pink watermelon or refreshing cantaloupe, Illinois produces both types.*

- Melons grow well in the sandy soil of the Illinois River Valley.
- Illinois River Valley melons begin to ripen in late June or early July, but peak season is mid-August through September.
- Americans eat more watermelon than any other melon variety.
- All melons contain high amounts of vitamin C, an antioxidant that helps boost your immune system.
- 2101 acres of watermelon are grown in Illinois.

Source: [www.ilfbpartners.com/farm/melons-farm-facts/](http://www.ilfbpartners.com/farm/melons-farm-facts/)



## Selecting & Storing...

Watermelon is truly one of summertime's sweetest treats. It is fun to eat, and good for you! Producing a good watermelon is a bit tricky in the short northern season. The sweetest watermelons grow during long hot summers. Harvesting is particularly critical because watermelons do not continue to ripen after they have been removed from the vine. They should be picked at full maturity. No amount of thumping, tapping, sniffing, or shaking can actually give a clue to ripeness.

Look for melons that are very heavy and have a hard rind. Ninety percent of watermelon is water. The rind color should be right for the variety with a waxy bloom. Probably the most important indicator of ripeness is the underside which sets on the ground. Turn the melon over. It should be yellow or creamy colored on the underside. If it is white or pale green the melon is not ready to harvest.

The flesh should be deep colored with mature seeds. Most watermelons have dark brown or black seeds. The seedless variety produces a few white seeds. Once picked, uncut watermelon can be stored for about 2 weeks at room temperature especially if the temperature is about 45 to 50°. Uncut watermelons have a shorter refrigerator life, so store at room temperature until ready to chill and eat. Tightly cover cut pieces in plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days.

Source: <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/veggies/watermelon.cfm>



For more information on selecting and harvesting watermelons, please visit <https://bit.ly/2Wlkh7h>. Nancy Kreith, University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator, provides a few tips shoppers and growers can follow to enjoy most delicious melons of summer.



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## August Word Search

W A T E R P E P T T S N Y J Y  
D J A A O P C S E S D T I U I  
N O S M I R C N M S E B V I Y  
X B G H W I D E R U E V O C G  
O O J P N E L G A M S S R Y N  
B O C C R O W C R M D Y A A E  
E G I G N L V I M E Z N O W H  
C P O T N A L P Q R E J U G T  
I L L P T B I Y H T I N A O T  
D B C X H I M I K I Y P Y E R  
C R Q R V B Z G T M Q O E C R  
Y E L L O W T O C E Z W G H N  
X C H E E V M R X D S M G N K  
O O F X L T L C M Z U Z G A C  
X A D S S D A X I Z M B O E K

Crimson

Green

Harvest

Icebox

Juicy

Melon

Picnic

Plant

Ripe

Round

Seeds

Summertime

Sweet

Tendergold

Water

Yellow

