

# Watermelon Facts

## Watermelon - Fruit or Vegetable?

For years people have debated whether watermelon is a fruit or a vegetable – we consider it both – here's why . . .

### Watermelon is a Fruit

Watermelon is the fruit of a plant originally from a vine of southern Africa. The watermelon fruit, loosely considered a type of melon (although not in the genus *Cucumis*), has a smooth exterior rind and a juicy, sweet, usually red interior flesh. The species descriptor *Citrullus vulgaris* is sometimes, synonymously, used to refer to this plant (*vulgaris* meaning "common" — Shosteck, 1974).

Like the pepper, tomato, and pumpkin, watermelon is botanically a fruit. According to Webster's dictionary and Wikipedia, a fruit is the ripened ovary of a seed plant and its contents, and a watermelon is a large oblong roundish fruit (2004, 2006). Consumers use watermelon primarily as a fruit because of its sweet flavor and refreshing qualities.

### Watermelon is Also a Vegetable

According to Webster's dictionary a vegetable is anything made or obtained from plants (2004). Watermelon is a member of the cucurbitaceae plant family of gourds (classified as *Citrullus Lantus*), related to the cucumber, squash, and pumpkin (Maynard, 2001). It is planted from seeds or seedlings, harvested, and then cleared from the field like other vegetables. Since watermelon is grown as a vegetable crop using vegetable production systems, watermelon is considered a vegetable (Wolford, 2004).

### How Watermelon is used as a Fruit or a Vegetable

Watermelon is popularly used as a fruit, to be a sweet enhancer or fun accompaniment to our everyday meals. The watermelon is often cut into bite-sized squares or balled, or very often simply sliced and enjoyed. It's also used in the types of recipes that are created using fruit.

The whole watermelon is edible, even the rind. In places like China, the watermelon is stir-fried, stewed and often pickled. In this case, the watermelon is being used as a vegetable. Pickled watermelon rind is also widespread in Russia. (Wikipedia 2006)

### Scientifically Speaking

The scientific name of watermelon is *Citrullus lanatus*. It is a member of the cucurbitaceae family. Life; Embryophyta (plants); Angiospermae (flowering plants); Order: Cucurbitales (pumpkin and melon family); Family: Cucurbitaceae

There are about 120 genera and 735 species of Cucurbitaceae worldwide, with 18 genera and 76 species native to southern Africa. Some well known vegetables fall in this family such as watermelon, hubbard squash, butternut, pumpkin, sweet melons and cucumber.

### All a Matter of Perspective

Depending on how you want to classify it, a watermelon can be considered a fruit or a vegetable. No matter which way you slice it, watermelon is fun to eat and very good for you!

#### References

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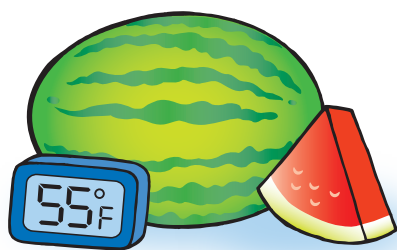
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## Watermelon Care & Handling

### How Do I Pick A Good Watermelon?

Some people like to tap a watermelon and listen for a "thump." Although folks rely on that method, we've found following these tips will help pick the best watermelon available.

1. Look it over, choose a firm, symmetrical watermelon that is free of bruises, cuts and dents.
2. Lift it up – the watermelon should feel heavy for its size – it is 92% water.
3. Turn it over – on the underside of the watermelon there should be a creamy, yellow spot (called the ground spot) from where it sat on the ground and ripened in the sun.



### What's the Proper Temperature for Storing Watermelon?

#### Store whole watermelon on the warm side

Compared to most fruits, watermelons need a more "tropical" climate - a thermometer reading of 55° F is ideal. However, whole melons will keep for 7 to 10 days at room temperature. Store them too long, and they'll lose flavor and texture.

#### Lower temperatures cause chill injury

After two days at 32° F, watermelons develop an off-flavor, become pitted and lose color. Freezing causes rind to break down and produces a mealy, mushy texture. Once a melon is cut, it should be wrapped and stored at 37° - 39° F.

### Should I Wash a Watermelon before I Use It?

Yes. According to the FDA, you should wash all fruits and vegetables, including watermelons, in clean, running water before eating them. This is true of all fruits and vegetables, whether they have rinds or not.

You should also use clean knives and cutting surfaces, taking care to never cut fruit or vegetables with a knife just used to cut raw meat, chicken or seafood. Additionally, persons preparing melons, fruits, vegetables or other foodstuffs should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water prior to preparing the food for eating.

