

# MELONS

**Spanish:** melones **Russian:** дыня (дыня) **Vietnamese:** dưa

There are many varieties of melon throughout the world. They are believed to have first been cultivated between 4,000 and 5,000 years ago in Africa and Southwest Asia. They are thought to be one of the earliest domesticated plants. Towards the end of the Roman Empire they were brought to Europe. Christopher Columbus brought melon seeds on his second expedition to North America. Watermelons are slightly different from other melons and were brought to the United States by African slaves. It was not until the latter half of the 20th century that melons were commercially cultivated in the United States. Before that, they were mostly grown in home gardens. China is the largest producer of melons in the world.

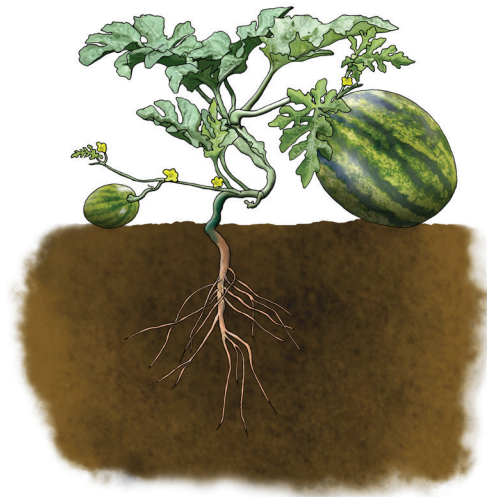


**FIND OUT MORE:**

[http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/download/Summer/021712/ED\\_Melons\\_Newsletter\\_Final.pdf](http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/download/Summer/021712/ED_Melons_Newsletter_Final.pdf)

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## FROM SEED TO PLATE



Melons are an annual fruit and require a long growing season. There are male and female flowers on the plant, which require bees for pollination. They grow best under conditions with warm, sunny days and cool nights. Watermelons are loosely called melons because, although in the cucurbitaceae family, they are only distantly related to honeydew or cantaloupe.

**FIND OUT MORE:**

<http://cuke.hort.ncsu.edu/cucurbit/wehner/articles/book14.pdf>

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Melons are in the cucurbitaceae family, also called gourd family, which includes squash, cucumbers, zucchini, and pumpkin!

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1262.html>

## IN THE GARDEN

Melons may be challenging to grow in preschool and center-based gardens, because they take up lots of space! They also do best with a few months of heat, which may be difficult to provide in northern regions. However, the effort required is worth the delicious taste of vine-ripened melons!

Here are some tips for growing melons in your classroom garden:



**SUN:** Plant in direct sunlight. Melons grow optimally with 6 hours of direct sunlight each day.



**WATER:** Watering roughly every 3 days is adequate after melons have flowered, as melons do not require substantial watering.



**SOIL:** Fertile, well drained soil. Temperature required for germination is around 60 F degrees but is optimal between 70 F and 95 F degrees.



**SEEDS:** Seeds can be sowed directly outside after temperatures exceed 65 F degrees. Transplants can go outside after all danger of frost has passed. In Western Oregon, this is around mid-May. Directly sow watermelon when soil is warm to the touch, normally in late spring or early summer.



**SPACE:** Prepare raised 3 foot wide planting hills 5-6 ft apart. Melons love manure for fertilizer. Plant roughly 6 seeds per hill and then thin to 3 plants after ten days.



**HARVEST:** Melons are ready to be harvested when they are firm and the plant will easily let go of the melon, between 75-100 days. Watermelon should be cut from the vine, while other melons can be pulled. After melons have been picked, they should be placed in the shade or in a cold room and handled carefully.

## STORAGE AND HANDLING

- Choose melons that are firm, symmetrical, and heavy for their size.
- Avoid melons with bruises, cuts, or dents. Watermelons should have a creamy yellow spot where they sat on the soil.
- Store melons at room temperature for 7-10 days. After cutting, they will keep for 3-4 days in the refrigerator.
- Freezing can cause the rinds to break down and create a mealy, mushy texture.

### FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.watermelon.org/Media/MediaKitImages/FoodService/Selection%20Storage.pdf>

### FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/growing-melons-zm0z1lzkon.aspx?PageId=2#axzz2SFPK6q3K>

## IN THE KITCHEN

Melons are normally eaten raw, but you can also experiment with grilling, which will create a sweet-smoky flavor. They are a delicious snack and can be cut up into cubes for a fruit salad or into wedges to eat on the go. Try blending melons into smoothies, serving them in a savory salad, or even making watermelon popsicles! Watermelon popsicles can be made by removing the seeds and peel, blending the fruit together, and then freezing them in a popsicle mold. However you prepare them, melons are a delicious and healthy sweet treat.

Try the classroom recipe at home, with this family-size version:

### STRAWBERRY-MELON SUMMER SALAD

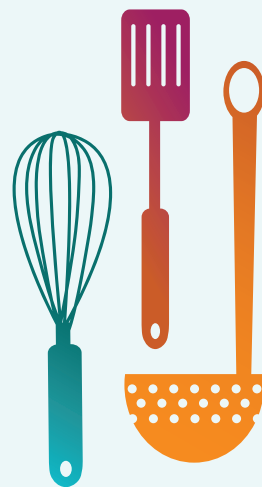
Serves 6

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup lemon yogurt
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 2 cups watermelon balls
- 2 cups cantaloupe balls
- 2 cups halved fresh strawberries

#### DIRECTIONS

1. Wash strawberries and remove tops. Cut them into halves.
2. Slice open the melons and cut them into cubes or use a melon baller to scoop out balls of melon.
3. Combine the melons and strawberries in large bowl.
4. In a separate bowl, combine the lemon yogurt, brown sugar, and lemon juice.
5. Fold the sauce into the strawberry-melon mixture, being careful not to mash the fruit.
6. Serve directly after tossing. The fruit salad can get a little watery if it sits out too long.



## FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The family newsletter for “melons” can be sent home at the beginning of the month. The newsletter is available in English, Spanish, and Russian. Print the first page only, or add photos and stories to the second page and print both sides for families.



### GET PARENTS' ATTENTION!

- Attach the newsletter to the child by attaching a string of yarn to the paper and making a newsletter “necklace” or pinning the newsletter to an article of clothing.
- Attach the newsletter to a drawing or other piece of artwork created by the child
- Get a set of “Ask me about \_\_\_\_” stickers or nametags, or use blank nametag stickers to draw attention to the fruit or vegetable of the month. Send each child home with an “Ask me about melon!” sticker for the melons month.
- Offer tastes of the recipe of the month at a parent meeting or when parents pick up their children from your site.

## MELON VARIETIES

Watermelon • Cantaloupe • Honeydew



### ABOUT HARVEST FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Harvest for Healthy Kids is a nutrition program designed to introduce children to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables through their meals and snacks and classroom activities. Monthly family newsletters engage families as partners in helping children to develop healthy eating habits. Harvest for Healthy Kids is a partnership between Mt. Hood Community College Head Start and the School of Community Health at Portland State University.