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Three tips to pick out a sweet watermelon

A good watermelon is a staple, healthy summer snack, so it is important to know how to pick one, regardless if you are at the grocery store or the local farmers market.

When it comes time to pick the perfect melon, people often make their selection based on three characteristics: presence of seeds or lack thereof, size and ripeness. Determining ripeness requires some knowledge; how can you pick a ripe watermelon?



Tip 1: Find the yellow belly, or the field spot

Other than cutting open a watermelon to see the inside, the field spot is perhaps the best indicator of the ripeness. This spot on a melon shows where it was laying on the ground while attached to the vine.

If the watermelon is ripe, the field spot should be a large, yellow patch on one side of the melon. If it is ripe, the color should be a creamy, almost butter-like yellow. The bigger the yellow belly and the creamier the color means the more time the melon spent ripening on the vine. However, if the spot is smaller or looks more white than yellow, then the melon may not be as ripe.

Tip 2: Tap the underbelly and listen for a deep sound

Another way to find a ripe watermelon is to lightly knock the outside with your knuckles. A ripe melon will have a deeper sound, as opposed to an over-ripe one that will have a more hollow or flat sound. A duller, more hollow sound can mean the flesh is starting to go soft and spoil.

Tip 3: Look for a dull and heavy watermelon

Although it may not be the most photogenic nor the easiest to carry to your car, the best watermelons will be dull in appearance and heavier than the rest. A shiny melon indicates the insides are under ripe.

Also, the best melon of the bunch will most likely be heavier than the rest. On average, a watermelon is 92% water, which makes them so juicy. A heavier melon likely holds more water, which will make it juicier.

Source: <https://agrifetoday.tamu.edu/2020/06/24/three-tips-to-pick-out-a-sweet-watermelon/>

Beginners guide to harvesting rainwater

With ongoing droughts across much of the state, rainwater harvesting is something nearly every Texan can do to make the most of the moisture they get.

“Even after the much-needed rainfall we recently received in late May and June, much of Texas is still under varying levels of drought from ‘severe’ to ‘exceptional,’” said Allison Watkins, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service horticulturist for the Concho Valley. Many homeowners erroneously think that if they live in an area with little rainfall, it’s not worth trying to catch for use later. “Infrequent rainfall is exactly the reason to harvest rainwater,” Watkins said.

Rainwater harvesting is one way homeowners can invest in their landscape and continue to garden during drought while also protecting valuable water resources. “Plants love rainwater and catching when it does come, to use later when it’s hot and dry, will really help plants survive and thrive in a yard or garden,” she said.

What you need

- A way to collect rain — a roof is ideal.
- A method to direct the water, such as a rain gutter and downspout.
- Something to store the water in. The container can be a rain barrel or even a large, clean trash can.
- A way for water to reach the container — a pipe, pvc tube or rain chain.

What you don’t need

- A gutter. Determine the lowest point of the roof or the valley where rain would naturally run off.
- Heavy rain — any amount of moisture that accumulates — will work with gravity to help fill your container.

Keep in mind

- This water is “grey water,” which is suitable for watering plants, washing your car or other places, but is not to be consumed by people or pets.
- If you want a system that will provide drinkable water, that is a more advanced system and special equipment and expert advice is needed.
- Your local AgriLife Extension horticulturist or Texas Master Gardeners group can help you get started. Texas A&M AgriLife offers many resources including a rainwater harvesting website and instructions on making a rain barrel on YouTube.

“I’d encourage everyone to utilize the information AgriLife Extension has to offer when getting started harvesting rainwater,” said Watkins. “From keeping your water mosquito-free to making a filter to catch leaves and other debris from entering your system, there are many resources to help make your first foray into rainwater harvesting a success.”

Source: <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2022/06/08/beginners-guide-to-harvesting-rainwater/>



Gardening programs benefit mental health of all ages

Jayla Fry, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service program coordinator for the agency's Texas Master Gardener volunteer effort, said almost every day she sees gardening's calming effect and ability to improve a person's outlook.

"Through the Department of Horticultural Sciences, AgriLife Extension oversees thousands of adult Master Gardener volunteers throughout the state," she said. "These Master Gardeners support agency horticultural programs and reach tens of thousands of people annually through their educational and community beautification efforts. These volunteers can attest to the positive psychological benefits gardening provides for them — and for those they work with in the community."

Further commenting on the intersection of plants, gardens and mental health was Joseph Johnson, manager of The Gardens at Texas A&M University, Bryan-College Station.

"We think of The Gardens area as the Central Park for the Texas A&M University campus," he said.

The Gardens is a 27-acre public teaching garden on campus that serves as a living classroom for educational, inspirational and recreational experiences. Primarily a peaceful retreat away from the activity of campus and the surrounding community, students and visitors alike visit to enjoy and learn from the nature that surrounds them.

"The Gardens helps enrich their lives by connecting them with the living world of horticulture," Johnson said. "Students and community members can more easily relax being in such a beautiful and tranquil place. It makes them feel more peaceful in their minds and souls."

Master Gardeners are involved in a number of community outreach and education activities related to gardening and horticultural education. (Texas A&M AgriLife photo)



Source: <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2022/04/25/the-positive-effects-of-gardening-on-mental-health/>

Fruity Crunchy Chicken Salad

Ingredients:

1 cup chopped, cooked chicken breast
1 cup canned mandarin orange segments drained and cut into pieces

1/2 cup dried cranberries
1/2 cup almond slices
1/2 cup peeled jicama chopped
4 cups lettuce
1/3 cup reduced fat salad dressing



Nutrition Facts

4 servings per container	
Serving size	(207g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	250
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 85mg	4%
Total Carbohydrate 32g	12%
Dietary Fiber 5g	18%
Total Sugars 24g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 15g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 70mg	6%
Iron 2mg	10%
Potassium 418mg	8%

*The % Daily Value tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Directions:

1. Wash your hands and clean your food preparation area.
2. In a large mixing bowl, mix the chicken, orange pieces, cranberries, almonds, and jicama.
3. Add the salad dressing and toss to coat.
4. Cover the bowl with foil or plastic wrap.
5. Refrigerate it for at least 1 hour or overnight.

Source: <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu/>

Taylor County News

Upcoming Events in July:

- 4—County Holiday—Extension office closed
- 6—4-H Leadership Day
- 7-8—Multi-County 4-H Camp
- 12—District 7 4-H Record Book Judging
- 19—4-H Award Interviews
- 20—TCBY (Taylor County's Best Youth) Program

Upcoming Events in August:

- 9—Child Car Seat Check-up Event
- 11—TCBY (Taylor County's Best Youth) Program
- 12—County 4-H Banquet
- 15-16—Certified Food Manager Training/Testing

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