A Guide for Growing Watermelons

Evidences show that watermelons originated in the Kalahari Desert in Africa thousands of years ago. Hieroglyphics unearthed from excavations in Egypt reveal the fact that watermelons were cultivated and harvested in Egypt 5,000 years ago. Gradually, watermelons found their way into Mediterranean countries via the sea trade route. Watermelons were cultivated in China during the 10th century and today, China is ranked as the number one watermelon producer of the world! Around the 13th century, cultivation of watermelons had spread throughout Europe. The term ‘watermelon’ was first mentioned in the English vocabulary in the early 17th century. African slaves brought watermelon to the United States. Today, the US ranks fourth in the production of watermelon in the entire world.

A watermelon is a staple food item in every household during the summer months. If you have a small patch in your backyard, you could grow sweet and refreshing watermelons there.

A Few Tips for Growing Watermelons

A watermelon plant thrives best in a warm and humid climate. Watermelon plants need good sunlight and have to be well watered. You could either sow the seeds or buy saplings from a nursery. Some of the popular varieties of watermelon include Charleston Gray, Triple Crown, Crimson Sweet, Sugar Baby and Black Diamond. Here are a few tips to grow watermelons in your backyard:

→ When you plan to cultivate watermelons, choose an area that has good sunshine and is protected from winds. However, make sure there is ample air circulation around the selected spot.

→ Next important step is to make the soil fertile by adding organic fertilizers and tilling it well. A sandy, fertile loam that retains moisture but is well-drained is the best soil for the cultivation of watermelons. You can prepare the soil by adding manure, compost and dead leaves and blending these well with the soil by tilling. Water the patch regularly to keep it moist. This is done prior to either sowing or transplanting the watermelon saplings.
If you are using seeds, soak them in compost tea for a few minutes prior to sowing. Make small hills in the watermelon patch. Plant a couple of seeds in each hill by making a hole of 1-inch depth. However, if you are transplanting the saplings, remove them from the polythene cover in which they were initially grown. Slowly place them in 1 to 2-inch deep holes. Remember to allow sufficient space between two plants.

Keep the watermelon patch clean. Once a week, add a slow-release fertilizer. The size of the fruit depends upon the fertility of the soil. Once in a while, spray the plants with seaweed or liquid fertilizer. Reduce the usage of nitrogen fertilizers once the watermelon plants start to flower. However, add potassium and phosphorous fertilizers until the harvest time.

One of the best ways to keep the air and soil warm on a frosty day is to cover the watermelon patch using floating row cover. However, once the flowers start blooming, remove the row cover.

A watermelon plant is ready for harvest after 35-40 days of planting. Here are a few tips to know whether a watermelon is ripe enough to be harvested:

If the curly tendrils near a watermelon have turned brown it is a clue the fruit is ripe. Another clue is, the underside of a watermelon would turn cream, from light green, if it is ready for harvest. Yet another clue is, thumping a watermelon. If it is ripe, you would hear a dull and hollow sound. When the melon is not heavy but the sound heard is heavy it is an unripe watermelon.

Hope you enjoyed learning about watermelon cultivation!

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