

by Mary Ellen Graybill

The deliciously sweet watermelon was ripe for picking by the end of August at the watermelon patch at Gypsy Hill Road this summer, thanks to good weather conditions.

The excessive heat this summer was not great for people, but was ideal for the juicy fruit to ripen extra sweet. Elisabeth Weaver, founder of the Lancaster Farmacy organic community supported agriculture (CSA) had enough perfect watermelons to fill all orders. The ants went away. The cucumber beetles were harmless. The rain fell in proper amounts, and sunshine and high temperatures produced a great watermelon harvest.

"Round, round plump watermelon

Nice and juicy watermelon

Have it first, it will quench your thirst

Keeps you fit in the heat, heat, heat..." (folk saying)

How did the rain affect the watermelon crop? It provided the right amount of rain for sweetest watermelons ...lots of rain at the beginning of the growing season, with high temperatures followed by less rain and more high temperatures seemed to be the key to success.

You can add some Epsom salts to the soil for added sweetness. But this summer, it was the combination of rainfall and heat and then less rain and more heat that produced, naturally, sweet organic watermelons at the farm.

Picking the best melons for sale was easy: we discarded any with imperfections, and got to eat them ourselves! Some had been damaged by a fungi. We learned that when the bright green rind turned a dull green colored rind that the melons were ripe. We looked for continued stripes around the watermelon and a creamy yellow color on the bottom where the melons rested on the ground. These would be good watermelons!

Jana Phillips and her son, Ty, were visitors to the barn one day, where they talked about how much they enjoyed seeing watermelons, cucumbers, beets and tomatoes grow.

And, did you know that watermelon is considered both a fruit and a vegetable related to cucumbers, pumpkin and squash? It also contains more lycopene (an antioxidant good for you) than tomatoes. The watermelon white part of the rind is edible, and contains more beneficial chemicals good for immunity, heart health, lowering blood pressure and heart stress. As if the taste were not enough to get you to drink watermelon juice, think about the Vitamin C, B6, Potassium and Vitamin A, Magnesium that protects the body from muscle pain after the work of harvesting!

One thing to remember, however, "Eat melon alone, or leave it alone, because it will make your stomach groan." That means it takes watermelon a shorter time to digest and you shouldn't mix it with other foods within about a half hour before or after consumption. (This information is not intended to replace advice from your health care professional. See the scientific nutritional statements on line at Dr. Joseph Mercola's "Six Watermelon Facts That Might Surprise You.")

# The Watermelon Harvest is Done



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