

Honeydew Melon

Grow

Honeydew melon, *Cucumis melo*, is a round, oblong fruit. Two main types of honeydew exist based on color. White honeydew melons have a smooth, white skin and pale green flesh. Yellow honeydew have a golden skin and green flesh. Honeydew and other types of melons belong to the gourd or *Cucurbitaceae* family. It is a member of the Inodorous Group of melon cultivars with Crenshaw, Casaba, American and Oriental Sweet melons. These melons have a smooth rind and subtle sweet flavor.

Honeydew's origins have been traced to southeast Asia and Africa. It then was introduced to Europe and Western cultures as far back as the 1600s.¹⁻³

Fun Fact: Christopher Columbus brought the first melon seeds to North America on his second expedition.¹⁻³

Honeydew typically grows on a vine in loamy or sandy soil. Planting is typically between April and May. It may take 3-4 months for honeydew to grow until mature enough to be picked. Melons grow best spaced 12" apart in raised row beds spaced 4-6' apart. Honeydew require sunny, dry, hot (above 70°F) environments to grow properly. They can handle above 100°F temperatures. Honeydews are hand-harvested based on maturity, not size. They are unlike other melons in that they do not separate easily from the vine when they reach maturity. They will ripen at room temperature after picking.¹

Fun Fact: Honeydew is sometimes called the winter melon because of how long it takes to grow.¹

Choose

Opt for honeydew melons that are heavy and well-shaped. Full grown honeydews average 4-8 pounds. Avoid honeydew melons that are too firm or too soft. Watch out for dark bruising. A soft stem end and faint sweet smell indicates ripeness. A completely ripe honeydew melon may have light wrinkling on the surface. Honeydew bruises easily. Handle carefully.^{1,3}



Store

Store firm (unripe) honeydew at room temperature, then use immediately or refrigerate. Store ripe honeydew in the refrigerator and use as soon as possible. Honeydew melons produce natural ethylene gas. Store away from lettuce and other ethylene-sensitive fruits and vegetables. Fresh-cut melon can rapidly absorb odors so take care with storage. Ripe honeydew can be cut into bite-size pieces and frozen.^{1,3}

Fun Fact: The gourd family includes both fruits (melons) and vegetables (squashes and cucumbers).¹⁻³

Use

Typically, only the flesh of melons is eaten, but every part of the honeydew melon, including the peel or skin, is edible. The rind can be cooked or pickled. Seeds can be dried or roasted. A refreshing fruit, honeydew can also be added to salads, smoothies and other recipes. Before cutting into a melon, be sure to wash the outside very well with clean, running water to minimize transferring any bacteria on the outside layer to the inside fruit. When cutting, slice the melon in half first. Scoop out the seeds from the middle of each half. Honeydew can be further sliced into wedges or the flesh can be scooped out to use. Refrigerate cut melon until ready to serve.¹

Honeydew Melon

Teach

Honeydew melons grow on vines. Each vine produces 3-4 melons. The vines have both male and female flowers. Only female flowers develop into melons. A melon bud develops at the blossom base. Female flowers can be distinguished from male flowers by the tiny bulb at the base of the flower. The flowers require pollination for proper fruit set. Bees and butterflies can help.¹

Class Activity - *Butterfly Feeders*

Materials Needed:

- Variety of melons - honeydew, cantaloupe, casaba, watermelon, etc. cut into bite-size pieces
- Acrylic plates (to avoid leakage or breakage)
- Small jars (like a baby food jar)
- Water
- Hammer and nail
- Kitchen sponges, string, and scissors
- Construction paper

Steps: **Use food safety steps. Wash hands and produce.*

1. Have students place the melon varieties on the plates. Set plates outside in a sunny area, protected from wind. Observe to which melon butterflies are most attracted. Record observations.
2. For the jar feeder, mash ripe melon to make butterfly food. Mix melon with water in 1:3 ratio. Add to the jar.
3. Use a hammer and nail to make a small hole in the jar lid. Cut the sponge into strips (½" x 4"). Pull a sponge strip through the jar lid hole with ½" exposed. Ensure a tight fit to avoid leakage when the jar is inverted. Close the jar lid. Tie a string around the jar lid. Cut two long pieces of string. Attach the two pieces perpendicularly to the string tied to the jar to create a hanger. Add construction paper flowers to attract butterflies. Hang the feeder outside. Observe and record findings.

Class Activity - *Is it a fruit or a vegetable?*

Honeydew is in the gourd family which includes both fruit and vegetables. Have students discuss the honeydew origin and write a persuasive argument for whether it is a fruit or a vegetable.³

Eat

Sweet Green

One cup of fresh, cut pieces of honeydew has about 60 calories. Honeydew melon is low in sodium and fat and cholesterol free. It is an excellent source of vitamin C. Honeydew is also a source of folate, fiber, beta-carotene lutein and zeaxanthin.^{1,3-4}

Fun Fact: Because of their sugar content, honeydew are considered to be the sweetest of the melons.¹⁻³

Vitamin C helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, keeps our gums healthy, protects us from infections and bruising, aids in healing, helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Our body needs folate for blood cell, DNA and genetic development. Soluble fiber helps lower blood cholesterol. Insoluble fiber aids in digestion. Phytochemicals act as antioxidants preventing or repairing cell damage. Beta-carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin are carotenoids. Beta-carotene can bolster antioxidant defenses in cells and help neutralize free radicals that may damage cells. Our bodies can also turn beta-carotene into vitamin A, which promotes normal vision, supports the growth and health of cells and tissue, protects us from infection, and helps regulate the immune system. Lutein and zeaxanthin may help maintain vision.⁵

Fun Fact: Honeydew is the third most popular melon. Watermelon is first and cantaloupe is second.²

Find

For more honeydew facts and resources, visit:

1. University of Arizona. Yuma County Cooperative Extension, <https://cals.arizona.edu>
2. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, School Nutrition, <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/programs/fresh-fruit-vegetable>
3. California Harvest of the Month, <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
4. USDA Food Composition Databases, <http://ndb.nal.usda.gov>
5. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org