



NEWS RELEASE

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Cantaloupe: Safe Methods to Store and Enjoy

What is Cantaloupe? The melon known in the United States as a Cantaloupe or muskmelon is a member of the gourd family. This melon has a raised rind netting over a yellow-skinned background, orange flesh and a musky aroma. The gourd family includes honeydew, Crenshaw, casaba, and Persian melons, as well as cucumbers, pumpkins, squashes, watermelons, and chayote.

Cantaloupes grown in the United States are harvested from May to November, with the peak harvest from June to October. Melons are imported into the United States from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and other countries from November to May.

Selecting Cantaloupes at the Grocery Store

Choose cantaloupes that have a characteristic aromatic smell, a smooth, rounded stem scar, yield slightly to pressure on the blossom end (opposite of the stem scar), and have a yellow background under raised well-developed netting. Melons should be free of cuts, bruises, or other defects.

If one side of the melon looks blemished, it is probably the “ground spot”, the point where the melon rested against the ground. The melon flesh inside the ground spot may look different and be less mature than the remainder of the melon, but the whole melon is fine to eat. This type of discoloration may also be due to sunburn. Sunburn is also a cosmetic defect that only affects eating quality when severe.

Storing Fresh Cantaloupes

The optimal storage temperature for ripe cantaloupe is 36 to 42 degrees F. The optimal relative humidity is 95 to 100 percent, which prevents drying. If possible store in the crisper where the humidity is higher. Depending on the degree of ripeness, cantaloupes will last 5-15 days in the refrigerator.

Safety Tips for Handling Fresh Cantaloupe

Cantaloupes are grown in close contact with the ground, which may occasionally introduce bacterial contamination from soil, water and animals. Contamination from human contact may arise during or after harvest. Cantaloupes should be washed by scrubbing with a clean vegetable brush, just before preparing and eating. It is best not to wash cantaloupes before storage; this ensures a longer shelf life for the uncut fruit.

Eating cut cantaloupes has been linked to food borne illnesses caused by Salmonella or Escherichia coli 0157:H7. In most cases the source of contamination cannot be determined; however bacteria present on the melon rind at time of purchase or harvest can transfer to the edible flesh when the melon is cut. Storing cut melons at room temperature or other warm conditions can lead to rapid growth of harmful bacterial on the flesh. Dirty utensils or cutting boards have been associated with contamination melons. For this reason it is important to wash hands before and after preparing melons and always use clean equipment, utensils and cutting surfaces.

Source: ANR Publication #8095, Cantaloupe: Safe Methods to Store, Preserve, and Enjoy.

