The well-known American author Mark Twain called watermelon “the food that angels eat.”

If the taste and fragrance of a fresh, juicy slice of melon makes your mouth water, you are in good company. Melons have been a favorite fruit for centuries. The well-known American author Mark Twain called watermelon “the food that angels eat.”

This season, enjoy traditional melons such as cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon, or go for more exotics by trying crenshaw, Persian, and casaba, called winter melons because they ripen slowly and are not ready until later in the season.

The crenshaw has a greenish-yellow rind and sweet, usually salmon-pink flesh. It is closely related to the casaba, honeydew, and winter melons. The Persian has musky, orange flesh and a rind with a netted pattern. The casaba is a white-fleshed melon similar to the honeydew and cantaloupe.

Any way you slice it, melon is a great, warm-weather pick-me-up. Remember to wash the melon before cutting to prevent contamination from the rind carrying into the fruit.

Here are some serving tips:

* Make a colorful fruit salad out of different kinds of melons and favorite berries, or dress up the table by putting different types of fruit and melons in a glass bowl or bowls. These taste even better if allowed to sit covered in a refrigerator for an hour or so until the flavors mix.

* Cantaloupe can be halved, seeded, and served as a “bowl” for other melons and fruits. Enjoy all-fruit blends, or mix with a low-fat yogurt or ice milk.

* Make a frosty drink by blending one cup of a
favorite melon with one cup ice. For those having a sweet tooth, sprinkle a touch of sugar in the drink. If a tart flavor is preferred, add a little lemon juice.

* For a delicious dessert, layer melon with pudding or a complementary-flavored yogurt in a parfait glass. Garnish with fresh mint leaves or crunchy granola.

* Try freezing melons for out-of-season use. Select fully ripe, firm melons. Remove seeds and peel. Cut or scoop into 3/4-inch cubes, slices, or balls. Pack melon into plastic freezer boxes or can-or-freeze jars (jars manufactured of glass tempered to withstand the heat of a pressure canner or subzero temperatures of a freezer), preferably wide mouth to facilitate removal of partly thawed food. Seal and label the container and then put in the freezer. When it’s time to serve the melon, do so before it is completely thawed.

What type of equipment is needed to start canning?

* It is best to use the type of home-canning jars and two-piece vacuum caps, boiling-water canners, and pressure canners described in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Complete Guide to Home Canning. The UW CES Food and Nutrition Web page at www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food_Preservation.htm links to on-line versions of this guide. Click on the Web Sites link and then on the USDA’s Complete Guide to Home Canning link to access the entire USDA publication. Or, click on the National Center for Home Food Preservation’s “How Do I Can?” link at http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/can_home.html.

A print version of the USDA guide can be ordered by e-mailing the UW College of Agriculture’s Resource Center at cespubs@uwyo.edu or calling the center at (307) 766-2115. For more information on canning and food preservation, contact a local UW CES office.

* Use only standard home-canning jars. Glass canning jars, also known as Mason jars after their 19th century American inventor, John Mason, are the best jars to use in home canning. Ball® and Kerr® brands are examples of Mason jars.

* Old jars and closures have a nostalgic appeal many people like; however, they are no longer approved for home canning. Jars requiring a zinc cap and jar rubber or jars requiring a glass lid, wire bail, and jar rubber have not been recommended since 1989 because there is no definitive way to determine if a vacuum seal is formed. This is one reason why the two-piece vacuum cap is superior to older-style closures.

Looking for a different pickle?
Looking for a different pickle? Try cantaloupe in a spicy melon pickle or watermelon rind pickles found in the 2005 Ball Blue Book, or check with a local University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service office (UW CES). Contact information is in your local phone directory and on-line at http://ces.uwyo.edu/Counties.asp.
Equipment for heat-processing home-canned food is of two main types – boiling-water canners and pressure canners. Most are designed to hold seven quart jars or eight to nine pints. Small pressure canners hold four quart jars; some large pressure canners hold 18 pint jars in two layers but hold only seven quart jars. Pressure saucepans with smaller volume capacities are not recommended for use in canning.

Small-capacity pressure canners are treated in a similar manner as standard larger canners and should be vented using the typical venting procedures detailed in USDA’s Complete Guide to Home Canning at http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/uga/using_press_canners.html. Steam canners are not recommended because the research is insufficient to establish procedures to yield safe products.

Smart, in-season shopping at a local farmers’ market and then storing the produce for maximum nutritional longevity requires know-how. When picking over produce, look for brightly colored vegetables or fruits with surfaces free of blemishes. Fruits and vegetables that are oddly or irregularly shaped may yield a visually less attractive product when they are canned, but when it comes to nutrition, irregularly shaped fruits and vegetables are no different. Additionally, odd-shaped produce may be more common at farmers’ markets, where local growers may not be able to achieve as much uniformity in their products.

When arriving home, discard any damaged produce that sneaked past the initial inspection since “bad spots” can provide starting points for mold. Resist the temptation to immediately wash all of the produce – wait until it is ready to be used. Keep fruits and vegetables dry in storage.

Green fruit can be left on the counter to ripen because sunlight isn’t necessary to ripen fruit. In fact, sunlight is not recommended since it can cause overheating (preventing proper color and flavor development) and increase the risk of rot. Most fruits and vegetables should go into the crisper drawer of a refrigerator; however, tomatoes should never be kept in a refrigerator because they lose their flavor rapidly and become grainy in texture. If they are not quite ripe, store them in a brown paper bag for a few days. Fully ripe tomatoes will keep for about one week at room temperature and out of direct sunlight.
Home Canner’s Questions

Q If home-canned foods have frozen during storage, are they safe to eat?

If the food was processed according to current home-canning recommendations, and the jars are still vacuum-sealed, the food should be safe to eat. Be sure to examine the jars closely; sometimes freezing can cause jar breakage or damage to the vacuum seal. Home-canned food that has been frozen during storage may be less desirable due to changes in texture, flavor, nutritional value, and color.

Q I have several peanut butter, pickle, and quart-sized mayonnaise jars I would like to use for canning. Is it safe to use these jars in a boiling-water bath canner or a pressure canner?

No! Mason-type canning jars are best because these jars have been specially tempered to withstand the heat necessary in the home-canning process. The jars asked about, however, make good refrigerator storage jars and are perfect for picnic packaging needs, or they can be recycled at a local recycling center.

Q How long is it safe to store canned food?

For optimum quality, use home-canned food within one year. After a year, the quality of food goes down, but it is still safe as long as the food was initially processed correctly, the seal is intact, and there is no sign of spoilage. Regardless of the age of the food, always boil low-acid, pressure-canned food a full 10 minutes plus one minute per 1,000 feet of altitude above sea level to destroy any botulism toxins. Do not taste the food prior to boiling, and do not eat the food if it foams or has an off-odor during boiling.

In addition to guidance on food preservation, the UW CES Food and Nutrition Web site at www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition provides information and links in other subject areas, including food preparation, food safety, food storage, and a number of nutrition topics. Contact a local UW CES office if you have questions.

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Some of the information for this fact sheet came from newspaper columns by Cindy Shuster, an extension educator for The Ohio State University in Perry County, Ohio, and from USDA’s Complete Guide to Home Canning.

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