

## **Extension Notes**

Personal Column for July 20, 2010

By Gary Hall, Iowa State University Regional Extension Education Director

### **Watermelon Blunder**

The watermelon was dark green and has been tempting me to pluck it out of the garden for some time. I rolled the round fruit over to see a light yellow spot where the fruit had been in contact with the ground. In my mind it was time to pull that watermelon from the vine and enjoy the sweet red fruit. I pulled hard on the stem and then pulled even harder to finally break it off of the vine. While carrying the prize of our garden to the house my taste buds were activated as my mind thought of the thrill of that first taste of dark red, sweet, fresh watermelon.

The melon was placed on a cutting board and a large knife selected. The cut slice separated from the melon to reveal a slight tinge of pink within a mostly white flesh. Even the heart of the watermelon was white and tasteless.

Telling when a watermelon is ready to be harvested is a difficult task. After my experience I started to research some Extension information on selecting ripe watermelons. Often several techniques are used in determining when to harvest.

- Look for the tendril that attaches at the same point as the melon to dry and turn brown. On some varieties this will need to be completely dried before the watermelon is ripe, and on others it will only need to be in the process of turning brown. I remember not consulting the tendril during my watermelon harvest.
- The surface of a ripening melon tends to lose its slick appearance on top and becomes dull when ripe. It will also develop a surface roughness (sometimes called “sugar bumps”) near the base of the fruit.
- Ripe watermelons normally develop a yellow coloration on the “ground spot” when ripe. This is the area of the melon that contacts the ground. Be sure to wait for the buttery yellow or cream color and not white or green.
- Rapping an immature melon with your knuckles produces a metallic ring. A ripe melon gives off a hollow or dull ring.

When harvesting a watermelon, leave about 2 inches of the stem on the fruit. Watermelons can be stored at room temperature for about a week, and for two to three weeks at 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

Don't succumb to the temptation of harvesting watermelon too early. Avoid my blunder. Enjoy all the flavor and pleasure the watermelon can provide by making the right selection.

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