

Sprite Melon

Grow

A sprite melon is a fruit that grows on vines that ramble on the ground. Sprite melons are a honeydew hybrid from *Cucumis melo*. The sprite melon originated in Japan. The Asian crisp flesh melons were introduced to farmers in North Carolina in the late 1990's after it was discovered that sprite melons could grow well in the state's climate. These small, oval, cream skinned, and white fleshed grapefruit-sized melons grow to 1-1½ pounds, much smaller than a traditional melon!¹⁻⁴

Sprite State

Despite it's increasing popularity, the sprite melon is grown almost exclusively in North Carolina. Growing conditions are similar to that of other melons with loamy soils being preferable and producing higher yields. Sprite melons are planted when the danger of frost has passed, usually as early as April. They are harvested June through November throughout eastern North Carolina with time from seeding to harvest being around 70 days.¹⁻⁵

Fun Fact: The North Carolina State University melon breeding program is working on developing new varieties of sprite melons that ripen earlier and have even better flavor.^{1,3}

Choose

Sensory Test for Sprite Melons

Select sprite melons that are well formed. The stem should be missing, leaving a shallow depression. Sprite melons turn from a cream or white color to yellow when ripe. The skin begins to show brown markings near the blossom end, which are called "sugar cracks", indicating the melon is ripe. It is also a sign of optimal sweetness. Smell the melon for a sweet fragrance. The melon's flesh should be juicy and firm and taste like a pear-honeydew hybrid. Unripe melon tastes more like a cucumber.

Watch out for bruised or mushy melons or melons that are green, soft or have deep cracks in the rind.¹⁻⁴



Store

Uncut sprite melons continue to ripen at room temperature. If stored at temperatures 45-55°F, shelf life could be 2-3 weeks. Cut melon should be stored in a sealed container in the refrigerator (32-36°F, 85-95% relative humidity) for up to three days. Sprite melons can be frozen by cutting into slices and placing them on a baking sheet with wax paper placed between layers. Once frozen, slices can be put in plastic storage bags until they are ready to thaw and serve.¹

Fun Fact: Though still considered a specialty crop, the sprite melon's popularity has soared. Annual production in volume of the fruit doubled from 2008 to 2009.⁴

Use

Sprite melons are the perfect size for snacks. They are best served naturally in slices. They 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. The outside layer can have bacteria that you do not want to transfer to the fruit inside. When cutting, slice the melon in half first. Scoop out the seeds from the middle of each half. The melon can be further sliced into wedges or the flesh can be scooped out to use. Refrigerate cut melon until ready to use or serve.

Sprite Melon

Teach

Sprite melons are part of the *Cucurbitaceae* family. There are about 825 species of foods and ornamental plants in this family. Cucurbits are native to temperate and tropical climates. This family includes cucumbers, gourds, melons, squashes, and pumpkins. Though they look and taste different, cucurbits have many things in common. Most species grow on vines and produce a fruit (or vegetable) that is fleshy and many seeded with a tough rind.

Throughout history, cucurbits have been used for many purposes. Since ancient times they have been used as instruments, decorations, and vessels for carrying water and other liquids.^{1,5}

Class Activity - *Cucurbits and Culture*

1. Have students research some of the ways cucurbits that have been used in past and present cultures.
2. Ask students to share their research findings with the class.

Fun Fact: Melons were first cultivated in Persia and northern Africa nearly 4,000 years ago, and later by ancient Greeks and Romans.⁵

Class Activity - *What a Melon*

Materials Needed:

- Different varieties of washed cucurbits: sprite melon, cantaloupe, gourds, cucumber, pumpkin, watermelon
- Knife and cutting board
- Poster paper and markers

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

1. Ask students to draw a Venn diagram and select two cucurbits to study.
2. Have students use their senses to find similarities and differences between their two cucurbits and record them in the Venn diagrams.
3. After several minutes, cut the cucurbits in half and allow students to continue observing. If time allows, let students taste the fruits and vegetables. Record taste test results in a Venn diagram.

Eat

Sprite Melons are the Sweetest!

One cup of sprite melon (a whole melon) has 110 calories and 150% of the recommended daily intake of vitamin C. Sprite melons are also a source of iron and fiber. They are cholesterol free and low in fat and sodium.¹⁻⁴

Fun Fact: Sugar content in sprite melons is 25 to 30 percent higher than most other melons. In fact, when ripe, they give off a sweet fragrance. The texture of the flesh is crisp like an apple. The flavor has hints of pear, watermelon, and honeydew.¹⁻⁴

Vitamin C acts as an antioxidant, aids in healing, protects us from infections, helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones, and tissues together, and helps our bodies absorb iron and folate from plants. Iron is needed for immune function, brain development, and hemoglobin, which carries oxygen from our lungs to every body cell. Insoluble fiber aids digestion. Soluble fiber helps lower blood cholesterol.

Their high nutritional value, unique flavor, and sweetness make Sprite melons a tasty and healthy choice!^{1-4,6}

Fun Fact: Sprite melons were originally developed in Japan. N.C. purchased seeds from Sakata seed company which has been researching crops for over 100 years.³

Find

For more sprite melon facts and resources, visit:

1. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
2. N.C. Grower Shipper Directory, www.ncfreshlink.com/shipperdirectory/spritemelons.htm
3. N.C. State University, Horticultural Science, <http://cucurbitbreeding.com/melon-breeding/>
4. N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Marketing Division, www.ncagr.gov/markets/commodity/horticultural/spritemelon/
5. California Harvest of the Month, <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
6. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org