

CATHOLIC CHARITIES MAINE CHILD & ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM

May/June 2014



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For a long time, watermelon has been taken for granted as a sweet, tasty summertime fruit, made of sugar and water, and nothing more. Over the past years, nutritionists, medical professionals, scientists and researchers have taken an interest to find out more about watermelon's health benefits. As it turns out, watermelon is incredibly healthy!

Watermelon contains higher levels of lycopene than any other fresh fruit or vegetable and is part of a healthy diet. Lycopene is a carotenoid that gives many fruits and vegetables their red color. It is currently the most powerful antioxidant which has been measured in food and is thought to play a role in preventing cancer and heart disease. However, how large a protective role lycopene plays is still under scientific study.

It's no coincidence that the word water appears in watermelon. Thirst quenching watermelon can help to replenish body fluids: one cup of diced watermelon is about 92% water. Water is the most vital nutrient for life--over two-thirds of your body is made up of water.

More great nutritional value of watermelon:

- Vitamin A found in watermelon is important for optimal eye health and boosts immunity by enhancing the infection-fighting actions of white blood cells called lymphocytes.
- Vitamin B6 found in watermelon helps the immune system produce antibodies. Antibodies are needed to fight many diseases. Vitamin B6 helps maintain normal nerve function and form red blood cells. The body uses it to help break down proteins. The more protein you eat, the more vitamin B6 you need.
- Vitamin C in watermelon can help to bolster the immune system's defenses against infections and viruses and can protect a body from harmful free radicals that can accelerate aging and conditions such as cataracts.
- A two-cup serving of watermelon is also a source of potassium, a mineral necessary for water balance and found inside of every cell. People with low potassium levels can experience muscle cramps.

If you're not going to eat the outer rind of a watermelon, why is it so important to wash the watermelon before you carve it?

- Traditionally, we wash things to make them clean and generally more sanitary, right? We wash our hands before we eat (or at least we should). We wash our dishes. We wash our clothes. We wouldn't think of NOT washing these things on a regular basis, so it only makes sense to wash our food, too.
- The main reason it's recommended that you wash your watermelon is to remove any dirt or other unseen "stuff" that might linger on the outside and be transferred to the *inside* of the watermelon when you cut into it. I'm not going to go into details about what sort of "stuff" might be loitering on the rind, but just think about how many people may have handled your watermelon in the grocery store before you purchased it, and that should paint a clear enough picture for you.

- That wash-it-before-you-carve-it recommendation isn't just our opinion. It actually comes from the USDA, the FDA and the National Watermelon Promotion Board.

So how should you wash your watermelon?

According to the aforementioned organizations, a quick but thorough bath under cool, running water should do the trick. For fruits with an outer surface that isn't eaten (like a watermelon), feel free to also give a light scrubbing with a clean washcloth or sponge. And although you might be tempted to add some dish soap or detergent to the mix to get things extra clean, the USDA and FDA recommend against that, because those cleaning solutions might not be approved by the FDA for use on food.

Watermelon Agua Frescas (Southern Living)



- 4 cups cubed, seedless watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew.
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 cups cold water

Process watermelon, cantaloupe, or honeydew melon and sugar in a blender until smooth, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Pour mixture through a fine wire-mesh strainer into a pitcher, discarding solids. Stir in 2 cups cold water. Cover and chill until ready to serve. Serve over ice.

Watermelon-Lime Freeze Pops (Food Network/Emeril Lagasse)

- 1 quart cubed, seeded watermelon
- 6 tablespoons sugar
- 4 tablespoons lime juice
- 1/2 cup mint



Directions

1. Combine all ingredients in the bowl of a food processor or a blender and puree until very smooth and the sugar is completely dissolved.
2. Divide the fruit puree among 6 or 8 (5-ounce) paper cups. (Alternatively, the mixture may be frozen in ice cube trays or in icpop molds, if available.)
3. Stand 1 ice-cream stick or plastic spoon in the center of each cup.
4. Cut 6 pieces of aluminum foil about 4-inches square. Poke a small hole in the center of each foil square and place 1 square over each cup, pushing the stick or spoon handle through the hole to hold it in a straight upright position.
5. Stand the cups in the freezer and freeze until set, at least 8 hours or overnight. Remove the pops from the freezer and discard the foil squares.
6. Gently tear the paper cups away from the fruit pops and serve.

Office Closing Dates: Friday, July 4th

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