



## Using, Storing and Preserving

# Melons

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*Michigan-grown melons are available during August and September.*

## Food Safety and Storage

- Wash hands before and after handling fresh produce.
- Avoid selecting melons of any variety that have broken skin.
- Choose muskmelons that readily break from the vine when ripe. The flower end of the melon – opposite the stem scar – should be slightly soft. If you find these types of melons at the market with pieces of the vine remaining on the fruit, then they were probably harvested too early and will not be as sweet.
- Choose muskmelons with a strong muskmelon scent. Ripe melons will smell like the melon.
- Unlike when choosing muskmelons, you may choose watermelons with a bit of vine attached at the stem end. Watermelons such as these are perfectly ripe. When picking watermelons in the garden, look for the tendril closest to the fruit. If this tendril is brown and dry, the watermelon is ready to harvest. In addition, a yellow color on the “belly,” or area of the melon that contacts the ground, indicates ripeness.
- Choose a watermelon that has a hard rind and feels heavy for its size. Contrary to popular belief, tapping



and thumping on a watermelon does not indicate whether or not it is ripe.

- You can safely store uncut watermelons for up to 2 weeks if kept in an area 45 °F to 50 °F.
- Wash fruit before cutting by thoroughly rinsing under cool running clean water or scrubbing with a vegetable brush while rinsing. This is the most important step when preparing fruit for serving. Rinsing the outside of the melon helps prevent any soil or harmful bacteria from getting into the melon when you cut it open.
- Wrap melon pieces tightly in plastic wrap and store them in the refrigerator. If stored properly, they can last up to 3 days.
- Keep melons away from raw meats and meat juice to prevent cross-contamination.
- For best quality and nutritive value, preserve no more than your family can consume in 12 months.

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## Yield

Melons come in many sizes and varieties and may contain different amounts of moisture. As a result, it is difficult to create a guideline for how much edible flesh will be produced per pound of fruit. Generally, a muskmelon that weighs 3 pounds will yield about 4 to 4½ cups of diced melon.

## How to Preserve

### Freezing

Michigan State University (MSU) Extension recommends enjoying melons when they are fresh, in season; however, freezing for later use is also an option. When selecting melons to freeze, make sure these fruits have particularly hard rinds and no dark spots.

When ready to freeze, wash and dry the melon as usually done in preparation. Then, slice the melon into cubes or use a melon baller to form balls, whichever you prefer. Place the pieces on a parchment-lined baking sheet and put them in the freezer for a quick freeze. After the pieces are solidly frozen, seal and store them in airtight containers. For best freezer results, eat the melon within a year to get all the nutritional value possible. Be aware that the melon may have a slightly different texture and lack some of its original sweetness after thawing.

### Canning

Melons are not well suited for canning unless pickled or made into preserves. The University of California does not recommend canning low-acid fruits, such as melon, because the traditional water bath canning process is not hot enough to reduce the possibility of bacteria growth and could result in botulism toxicity. Pressure canning could create high temperatures but would make the fruit mushy and inedible (Parnell, Suslow, & Harris, 2003).

Preserves or pickled melon recipes from reliable sources can be safely processed using a water bath canner because the addition of acids or acidic ingredients will lower the pH and inhibit the growth of harmful bacteria (Parnell, Suslow, & Harris, 2003).

## Watermelon Rind Preserves

**Yield:** About 6 half-pint jars

- 1½ quarts trimmed and cut watermelon rind pieces
- 4 tablespoons salt
- 2 quarts cold water
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 4 cups sugar
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 7 cups water
- 1 thinly sliced lemon (optional)

**To prepare watermelon rind** – Trim green skin and pink flesh from thick watermelon rind; cut into 1-inch pieces. Dissolve salt in 2 quarts water and pour over rind; let stand for 5 to 6 hours in refrigerator. Drain; rinse and drain again. Cover with cold water and let stand 30 minutes. Drain. Sprinkle ginger over rind; cover with water and cook until fork tender. Drain.

**To make preserves** – Sterilize canning jars. Combine sugar, lemon juice and 7 cups water. Boil 5 minutes; add prepared watermelon rind and boil gently for 30 minutes. Add sliced lemon and cook until the melon rind is clear. Pack hot preserves into hot jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened clean paper towel; adjust two-piece metal canning lids. Process in a boiling water canner (see table that follows for recommended processing times).

Recommended process time (in minutes) for watermelon rind preserves in a boiling-water canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitudes of		
		0 – 1,000 ft	1,001 – 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Half-pints or pints	5	10	15

“Watermelon Rind Preserves” recipe is adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) recipe of the same name ([https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_07/watermelon\\_rind\\_preserves.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_07/watermelon_rind_preserves.html)). The NCHFP adapted it from Andress, E., & Harrison, J. A. (2014). *So easy to preserve* (Bulletin 989). (6th ed.). University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

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## Cantaloupe Pickles

**Yield:** Makes about 4 pint jars

- 5 pounds of 1-inch cantaloupe cubes (about 2 medium under-ripe\* cantaloupe)
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 one-inch cinnamon sticks
- 2 teaspoons ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 4½ cups cider vinegar (5%)
- 2 cups water
- 1½ cups white sugar
- 1½ cups packed light brown sugar

\*Select cantaloupe that are full size but almost fully green and firm to the touch in all areas including the stem area.

### Day One:

1. Wash cantaloupe and cut into halves; remove seeds. Cut into 1-inch slices and peel. Cut strips of flesh into 1-inch cubes. Weigh out 5 pounds of pieces and place in large glass bowl.
2. Place red pepper flakes, cinnamon sticks, cloves and ginger in a spice bag and tie the ends firmly. Combine vinegar and water in a 4-quart stockpot. Bring to a boil, then turn heat off. Add spice bag to the vinegar-water mixture, and let steep for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Pour hot vinegar solution and spice bag over melon pieces in the bowl. Cover with a food-grade plastic lid or wrap and let stand overnight in the refrigerator (about 18 hours).

### Day Two:

4. Wash and rinse pint canning jars; keep hot until ready to use. Prepare lids according to manufacturer's directions.
5. Carefully pour off vinegar solution into a large 8- to 10-quart saucepan and bring to a boil. Add sugar; stir to dissolve. Add cantaloupe and bring back to a boil. Lower heat to simmer until cantaloupe pieces turn translucent, about 1 to 1¼ hours.
6. Remove cantaloupe pieces into a medium-sized stockpot, cover and set aside. Bring remaining liquid to a boil and boil an additional 5 minutes. Return cantaloupe to the liquid syrup, and bring back to a boil.
7. With a slotted spoon, fill hot cantaloupe pieces into clean, hot pint jars, leaving 1-inch headspace. Cover with boiling hot syrup, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened clean paper towel; apply two-piece metal canning lids.
8. Process in a boiling water canner according to the recommendations in the table that follows. Let cool, undisturbed, 12-24 hours and check for seals.

Recommended process time (in minutes) for cantaloupe pickles in a boiling-water canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitudes of		
		0 – 1,000 ft	1,001 – 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Pints	15	20	25

"Cantaloupe Pickles" recipe is adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) recipe of the same name in *Preparing and Canning Pickled Fruits* ([https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_06/cantaloupe.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_06/cantaloupe.html)) It was developed for the NCHFP at the University of Georgia and released by E. L. Address, Department of Foods and Nutrition, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, August 2003.

## References

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