

How To Grow Giant Watermelons

SOIL SELECTION

Choose a location that is high in organic matter with some fine sand mixed in the soil. Red or black clay soils are not good for growing watermelons. Be sure to add well-rotted manure, peat moss, or grass clipping to the place you plan to grow the melon. The site must be well drained, not where water remains in puddles.

SOIL TEST

Obtain a soil sample for analysis and give it to your county Extension agent.

FERTILIZER

The soil test will explain how much plant food is needed (fertilizer, lime, etc.).

VARIETY SELECTION

Plant the kind of seed that will develop into a *Big Watermelon*. Carolina Cross variety requires 130 days from planting to maturity. The melon will weigh up to 200 pounds. Check with your county extension agent for other varieties.

WHEN TO PLANT

Plant seeds in hills in late May. Plant four to five seeds per hill at a depth of one inch. When the plants have put on four leaves, remove all but one plant. Add water to keep the soil moist. Be sure there is adequate moisture when seeds are planted. Allow 100 square feet per each hill for vines to run.

MOISTURE

A high level of moisture should be present throughout the growing season. Two inches of water is needed every seven to ten days. Avoid having water remain in puddles on the soil surface for more than one day. Too much water may cause cracking.

INSECT AND DISEASE CONTROL

Watermelons have three or four common diseases. These diseases can be controlled by using a fungicide such as Daconil. Follow the label directions carefully.

REMOVING SMALL MELONS FROM THE PLANT

Allow the vine to grow about 15-feet long. The plant should be blooming at this time. Leave only two small, healthy melons on each hill. With scissors or a knife, cut off all new melons that set on the plant. When the melons are about a pound in weight, remove one, leaving only one melon throughout the growing season.

WEED CONTROL

Keep the weeds and grass under control throughout the growing season.

PROTECTION FROM THE SUN AND SOIL-BORNE DISEASE

The melon should be protected from the sun through the long growing period required to produce giant watermelons. Make a straw bed and carefully place the melon on it. Keep the straw dry by placing plastic, or better still, one inch of sand on the soil under the straw. This will prevent the spread of soil-borne disease. Then, cover the top of the melon with more straw. The straw will protect the melon from sunburn and rotting.

HARVEST

Watermelons are mature when the underside next to the ground is pale yellow. If this spot is vivid yellow, the melon is overripe and will decay more rapidly. If the melon is very hard or white or very pale green on the underside, it is probably immature and can be left on the vine.

HARVEST CARE

Cut the watermelon from the vine. Do not pull it off. Pulling can cause the melon to crack. Disease can enter through the crack and rot your giant.

Watermelons are sensitive to temperatures below 50°F. They will become pitted and rot faster when stored at temperatures below 50°F. Optimum storage is 50-60°F.