

Healthy Eating

Cool off with cantaloupe

By Kari Bachman

During the summer, roadside melon vendors are a common sight. Pickups filled with fruit entice us to stop and chat with local farmers and buy freshly harvested produce.

Melons are members of the squash family and have been cultivated by Native Americans in the Southwest for thousands of years. The orange color of cantaloupe-melon flesh is a sure sign of its nutritive value. Cantaloupe is a good source of Vitamin A, which strengthens our vision, and of Vitamin C, which helps the body fight infections.

Melons grow on the ground, which means that bacteria in the soil and irrigation water can contaminate the flesh when cut open. To avoid contamination, it's important to scrub melons with clean water before slicing them open.

While *agua de melón* ("melon water") is prepared less today than in the past, it's still a favorite among Hispanics in the Southwest. Many enjoy drinking it at lunch or dinner. In addition to Vitamins A and C, *agua de melón* adds calcium to the diet because it is made with milk. That's especially good for people who don't like to drink plain milk. When prepared with a sugar substitute, it's also good for people with diabetes. Compared to modern soft drinks, *agua de melón* is much more nutritious.

The next time you pass a roadside melon vendor, buy some fruit and take some time to chat with the farmer. You can enjoy good flavor and nutrition and also help support local, small-scale growers.

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