Cantaloupe, Watermelon, Honeydew...Oh My! When should you harvest melon?

K-State horticulture expert shares tips to harvest melon at the perfect time

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Harvesting melons at the perfect time is crucial to the best eating experience. Melons will have the highest sugar content if allowed to ripen fully on the vine, Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini said.

**Cantaloupe**

“When cantaloupes are ready for harvest they will easily separate from the vine,” Domenghini said.

If melon is ripe, Domenghini said by putting pressure on the fruit where the vine attaches, the fruit will slip off with a dip-shaped depression in the fruit. Twisting the stem to force separation indicates the melon is not ready.

“Additionally, the skin of the (ripe) melon should begin to show yellowing, instead of solid green during immaturity,” Domenghini said. “A ripe cantaloupe should have a musky fragrance and the end of the fruit opposite where the vine is attached should be soft.”

Domenghini said cantaloupe can be stored in a refrigerator for two weeks.

**Watermelon**

Watermelons are ready to harvest when the underside of the fruit changes from green-white to yellow. The melon will appear more dull, rather than glossy green, Domenghini said.

“The tendril attaching the fruit to the vine will turn black when the fruit reaches maturity,” Domenghini adds.

To harvest, separate the fruit from the vine by cutting the tendril, but leave about two inches still attached to the fruit. Store freshly harvested watermelons at room temperature for one week or in 50-60 degrees Fahrenheit for two to three weeks.

**Honeydew**

“Honeydew melons do not easily pull away from the stem when ripe,” Domenghini said.

Instead, she recommends relying on the change in color of the fruit from pale green to light yellow; the softening spot on the fruit opposite from where the vine attaches; and the aroma coming from the fruit.
“Honeydews can be stored for two weeks at 50 F,” Domenghini said.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden and yard-related questions to

Domenghini at cdom@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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