

Testing Watermelon: An Art

Thumpers, rappers, hefters and pluggers can test their watermelon picking know-how on Brazos Valley crops, now at harvest peak.

"Local crops are on the market now," says Dr. Edward E. Burns, horticulture professor in the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences at Texas A&M. "Prices are as good as they will be, and we are in the middle of the best time for quality. Retailers are clearing South and West Texas-produced melons."

The Adriance Lab food technologist offers tips for watermelon selecting. His methods won't leave pounded, bruised or mutilated fruit on the stands.

"I look first at shape," Burns explained. "I want a uniform melon with no gourd-like neck or other mishapen features."

"Surface color should be bright without any dullness.

Study the 'ground spot' in particular. It should be yellowish, rather than white. A paper-white color reveals an immature melon."

Burns said the fruit should have a "good, solid heft," though weights of different varieties at maturity vary.

Guidelines used by the scientist are reflected in a 1964 study of maturation of Charleston Gray watermelons by Wai Kit Nip, food technology graduate student from Hong Kong.

Grays are one of the more popular varieties, because of shipping characteristics. Black Wiamonds and other types also are commonly found in produce departments.

Burns doubts the ability of average shoppers to discern a good melon by thumping or knocking. Another method inserts a fingernail into the rind,

proper consistency indicating the ideal watermelon.

"Field hands and loads have the knack of picking a good melon, developed over a long haul period," he remarked. "They can't pin it down how they do it, but they do. They cut a lot of melons."

Thumping reveals turgidity of meat, a higher sound tattling on an unripe melon.

"If it goes 'thud, thud,'" Burns grinned, "it's over-ripe."

"Oldtimers check the tendril for a rough measure of ripeness," he added. The field method notes drying and color condition of the vine.

The prof said average Charleston Grays weigh 30 pounds maximum, the average size at maturity about 20 pounds though 15-pounders are eatable. Seeds in all but white-seeded varieties are tell-tale signs, he divulged.

"Botanically, the ovary is not mature until seed mature. Stage of color development is an indicator. If you fork up some white seeds and some dark ones, you have an immature watermelon."

Plugging is generally an infallible method of picking a properly ripened melon, but, points out the scientist, only a few retailers allow the knife-test method.

"The mark of a connoisseur is to ask for yellow-flehed watermelon," the taste panel director commented. "This is an orangish-yellow, green-striped melon very popular among East Texans. They won't slice anything else. It has a honey-sweet, distinctive flavor, of limited trade and therefore high quality."

One breed of seed-spitter is out of luck. There's no sure-fire way of getting a juicy, ripe watermelon by moonlight.

Prairie dogs vanished altogether from the 30-acre prairie dog town in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge near Lawton, Okla. It has been restocked with 38 of the sociable little ground squirrels.



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First Lt. Raymond E. Kramm, '63, receives the Army Commendation Medal from Maj. Gen. William R. Calhoun, commanding general of the VIII U. S. Army Corps, during a ceremony in the Corp headquarters at Austin. The award cited him for exceptionally meritorious and outstanding service as headquarters commandant and commanding officer.

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Sunday Deuteronomy 33:24-29
Monday Psalms 9:3-10
Tuesday Isaiah 51:4-8
Wednesday Matthew 25:31-40
Thursday Matthew 25:41-46
Friday Luke 10:25-37
Saturday Timothy 1:12-17

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