

Watermelon

History

The history of watermelon is not well known, but it is believed to have originated in Africa. David Livingston, a Scottish missionary and explorer, noted a high abundance of watermelon growing near the Kalahari Desert when on his travels in Africa in 1857. The melon is known there as the Tsamma melon and still grows in the wild today. It is unknown where watermelon was first cultivated, but it has likely been grown for over 4,000 years. The fruit has been used as both food and a source of water during dry periods. Interestingly, watermelon seeds were recovered from the tomb of King Tutankhamen. The Moors likely introduced watermelon to Europe in the 13th century during their rule of the Iberian Peninsula, which includes Spain and Portugal. By the 16th and 17th centuries, watermelon of different shapes, sizes, and colors were being described by European horticulturists.

The Spanish then brought watermelon to the Americas in the 1500s. American Indians are believed to have started cultivating the fruit shortly after that. European colonists also brought watermelon seeds with them as they settled in the Americas. By 1629, they were widely grown in Massachusetts.

Fruit or Veggie?

In 2007, Oklahoma designated watermelon as their state vegetable. They argued that watermelon is a member of the cucurbits plant family and is most closely related to cucumbers and gourds. While gourds and cucumbers are botanically fruits, from a culinary and government perspective, they are considered vegetables. Since watermelon falls in the same family, they are also considered a vegetable.

Fun Facts

- Watermelons are 92 percent water and 8 percent sugar.
- On average, Americans eat 17 pounds of watermelon each year.
- According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the largest watermelon weighed 262 pounds.
- Watermelon rinds are frequently cooked and eaten in many countries of the world.



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