

Hurray for Watermelon!

Written by Debbi Covington
Tuesday, 19 July 2011 14:37



*"Watermelon, watermelon, how it drips, how it drips
Up and down your elbows, up and down your elbows
Spit the pits! Spit the pits! " -sung to "Frere Jacques"*

It's as easy as 1, 2, 3! Look the watermelon over. You're looking for a firm, symmetrical watermelon that's free from bruises, cuts or dents. Lift it up. The watermelon should be heavy for it's size. Watermelon is 92% water, most of the weight is water. Turn it over. The underside of the watermelon should have a creamy yellow spot from where it sat on the ground and ripened in the sun.

For a long time, watermelon has been taken for granted as a sweet, tasty summertime fruit, made of sugar and water --- and nothing more. Over the past years, nutritionists, medical professionals, scientists and researchers have taken an interest to find out more about watermelon's health benefits. As it turns out, watermelon is incredibly healthy! It's the lycopene leader among fresh produce and has excellent levels of vitamins A and C and a good level of vitamin B6. A two-cup serving of watermelon is also a source of potassium. Watermelon is thought to have originated in the Kalahari Desert of Africa. The first recorded watermelon harvest occurred nearly 5,000 years ago in Egypt and is depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics on the walls of their ancient buildings. Watermelons were often placed in the burial tombs of kings to nourish them in the afterlife. From there, watermelons spread throughout countries along the Mediterranean Sea by way of merchant ships. By the 10th century, watermelon found its way to China, which is now the world's number one producer of watermelons. The 13th century found watermelon spread through Europe via the Moors. Watermelon is believed to have made its way to the United States with African slaves. The United States currently ranks fourth in worldwide production of watermelon. Forty-four states grow watermelons. South Carolina has been blessed this summer with a bumper crop of delicious watermelons. Pick one up at one of our local farmers' markets this week and try some of these yummy recipes. Enjoy!

Watermelon Pomegranate Green Tea

4 cups watermelon puree
2 cups pomegranate juice
4 cups strong prepared green tea, chilled

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1 cup white grape juice

Mix ingredients together in a large pitcher and chill. Serve over ice. Serves 8.

Watermelon Mango Margaritas

2 cups chopped seedless watermelon

1 piece ripe mango

Juice from 2 fresh limes

1 tablespoon sugar

1 tablespoon triple sec

2 jiggers tequila

2 cups ice

Place all ingredients in a blender and puree until smooth. Serves 2 to 3.

Balsamic Caramelized Onion Watermelon Caprese

¼ cup olive oil

1 sweet onion, thinly sliced

½ cup extra-dry vermouth

2 tablespoons sugar

¼ cup aged balsamic vinegar

1 pound fresh water packed mozzarella cheese, cut into 16 slices

16 slices watermelon (cut 2½-inch by 2½-inch by ½-inch thick)

1 cup fresh basil leaves

Heat the oil in a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and saute for about 8 minutes until onions are golden in color. Reduce heat to medium. Add the vermouth and sugar and simmer until most of the liquid has evaporated from the pan. Stir in the balsamic vinegar and cook another 3 minutes. Remove from heat and cool. Alternate slices of cheese and watermelon on 4 individual salad plates. Spoon onion mixture over the watermelon and onion stacks. Garnish with fresh basil. Serves 4.

Grilled Spicy Watermelon

1 tablespoon lime zest

¼ cup lime juice

¼ cup honey, divided

2 teaspoons garlic chili sauce

1 pinch salt

1 medium watermelon

1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro

Preheat grill to high. In a bowl, whisk together lime zest, lime juice, 3 tablespoons honey, garlic chili sauce and salt. Cut watermelon into 1-inch thick wedges. Lightly drizzle each side with remaining honey and place on the grill. Grill until just browned, about 2 minutes per side. Place grilled watermelon slices on a serving platter and drizzle with lime dressing. Garnish with cilantro. Serves 8 to 10.

Blue Watermelon Walnut Salad

1 cup walnut pieces

¼ cup sugar

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- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 2 cups balsamic vinegar
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 sprig fresh rosemary
- 4 ounces fresh baby greens
- 2 oranges, peeled and sectioned
- 4 cups seedless watermelon cubes
- 2 cups seedless grapes, halved
- 2 cups fresh sliced strawberries
- 1 cup crumbled blue cheese

Heat the walnuts in a heavy non-stick saute pan over medium heat for 2 minutes. Stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar and soy sauce. Adjust heat to prevent burning while constantly stirring the nuts until the sugar melts. Continue to stir and cook until the mixture gets sticky. Spread the nuts on a sheet of parchment paper to cool. Break apart into small pieces. Set aside. Heat the vinegar in a heavy non-corrosive saucepan over medium heat and stir in sugar. Continue to stir and adjust heat to bring the mixture to a simmer. Add the rosemary sprig to the pan. Continue to simmer until the contents of the pan reduces by $\frac{1}{2}$ its original volume. Discard rosemary sprig. Set aside. Divide the greens among 6 salad plates and arrange the orange sections, watermelon, grapes and strawberries over the greens. Drizzle the balsamic syrup over the fruit and crumble the cheese on top. Garnish with candied walnuts. Serves 6.

Grilled Shrimp Skewers with Watermelon Lemongrass Glaze

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh lemongrass
- 1 cup watermelon puree
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar

2 pounds medium shrimp, peeled and deveined

Skewer the shrimp; set aside. Heat oil in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Saute the garlic, ginger and lemongrass until soft. Reduce heat to low and stir in the watermelon puree and sugar. Stir until sugar is melted. And mixture is slightly thickened. Divide the mixture in two, setting aside one half for dipping. Use the other half to marinate the shrimp for 2 to 3 hours. Skewer the marinated shrimp and grill until cooked through. Heat the remaining glaze for dipping. Serves 6.

Cajun Chicken with Watermelon Mint Salsa

For the Salsa:

- 2 cups chopped seedless watermelon
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 large tomato, seeded and diced
- 1 jalapeno, seeded and minced
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh mint
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped fresh scallions

Toss ingredients together, cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

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For the Chicken:

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 tablespoons granulated garlic

2 tablespoons chili powder

2 tablespoons ground cumin

2 tablespoons sweet paprika

6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

Mix together the spices. Coat the chicken breasts with the spice mixture. Grill chicken until cooked through. Top with salsa and serve immediately. Serves 6.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.