Watermelon

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University
**Watermelon’s** popularity dates back nearly 5,000 years to ancient Egypt. Watermelon is believed to have originated in Africa’s Kalahari Desert, where explorers are said to have used them as canteens. According to John Egerton, author of *Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993), watermelons were most likely introduced to America by African slaves.

While more than 1,200 varieties of watermelons are grown worldwide in 96 countries, China produces the majority of the world’s crop. In the United States, Florida leads the way in watermelon production, followed by California, Texas and Georgia.

Watermelon is available May through September, with peak season from mid-June to August. By weight, watermelon is the most consumed melon in the U.S., followed by cantaloupe and honeydew. Aside from its traditional uses as a refreshing snack or dessert, these crisp, juicy melons fit nicely into all sorts of recipes, from salsas and relishes to salads, beverages and sorbets.

### Healthy ingredient contribution

- **LYCOPENE:** As a disease-fighting antioxidant, lycopene is found in red fruits and vegetables. Watermelon has higher concentrations of lycopene than any other fresh fruit or vegetable. In fact, fresh watermelon contains higher levels of lycopene than fresh tomatoes. A 1-cup serving of watermelon contains an average of 9 mg; one medium-sized tomato contains 4 mg.

- **POTASSIUM:** A two-cup serving of watermelon is also a source of potassium, a mineral necessary for water balance that is found inside every cell.

- **VITAMIN A:** Found in watermelon, vitamin A is important for optimal eye health.

- **VITAMIN B6:** Vitamin B6 is used by the body to manufacture brain chemicals (neurotransmitters), such as serotonin, melatonin and dopamine, which preliminary research shows may help the body cope with anxiety and panic.

- **VITAMIN C:** Vitamin C, found in watermelon, can help bolster your immune system’s defenses against infections and viruses, and is known to stimulate the immune system and protect against free radical damage.

- **WATER:** Watermelons are 92 percent water, hence their name.

### Varieties and uses

- Seedless watermelons bearing few to no seeds were invented more than 50 years ago. Their seeds are much smaller and white in color rather than the mature black ones. In fact, they are not seeds since they are oftentimes the seed coats that did not mature.

A seedless watermelon is actually a sterile hybrid created by crossing male pollen for a watermelon, containing 22 chromosomes per cell, with a female watermelon flower, with 44 chromosomes per cell. When this seeded fruit matures, the small, white seed coats inside contain 33 chromosomes, rendering it sterile and incapable of producing seeds.

- Of the 200 to 300 watermelon varieties grown in the U.S. and Mexico, there are about 50 popular varieties. Below are the five most common varieties.

**Icebox**
- Icebox (round; 5-15 lbs.; dark seeds)

**Mini watermelon**
- Red flesh (round; 1-7 lbs.; mostly seedless)

**Yellow flesh**
- Seeded (round; 10-30 lbs.; black seeds)

**Picnic**
- All sweet (oblong; 18-30 lbs.; small brown or black seeds)

**Crimson sweet**
- (round to oblong; 16-35 lbs.; medium-sized brown seeds)

**Jubilee**
- (oblong; 20-45 lbs.; large brown seeds)

**Seedless**
- Triploid hybrid (round to oblong; 10-20 lbs.; seedless)

**Yellow flesh**
- Seeded (round; 10-30 lbs.; black seeds)

**Seedless** (round; 10-30 lbs.)
Method:
- In blender, purée watermelon; pour into large mixing bowl. Stir in apples, onion, bell pepper, basil, salt, pepper, chili powder and vinegar. Refrigerate covered, at least 1 hour to blend flavors.
- Cut watermelon should always be tightly wrapped, refrigerated and used within a day or so.

Storage
- Store whole watermelons in the refrigerator, if possible, and keep no more than one week. If they are too large, keep in a cool, dark place.
- Cut watermelon should always be tightly wrapped, refrigerated and used within a day or so.

Serving size
2 cups diced watermelon = 80 calories, 30 percent vitamin A and 25 percent vitamin C of your daily value recommendations.

**WATERMELON GAZPACHO**

Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients:
- 6 cups cubed seeded watermelon
- 1 ½ cups chopped Golden Delicious apples
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- ½ cup finely chopped green bell pepper
- 1 t. dried basil
- ½ t. salt
- ¼ t. coarsely ground pepper
- ¼ t. chili powder
- 1 T. cider vinegar

Method: In blender, purée watermelon; pour into large mixing bowl. Stir in apples, onion, bell pepper, basil, salt, pepper, chili powder and vinegar. Refrigerate covered, at least 1 hour to blend flavors.

Nutrition Information

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<th>Calories</th>
<th>Fat: 1g</th>
<th>Sat. Fat: 1g</th>
<th>Carbs: 27g</th>
<th>Fiber: 3g</th>
<th>Protein: 2g</th>
<th>Calcium: 2%</th>
<th>Iron: 4%</th>
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<td>Ingredients:</td>
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Recipe provided by the National Watermelon Promotion Board, [www.watermelon.org](http://www.watermelon.org).