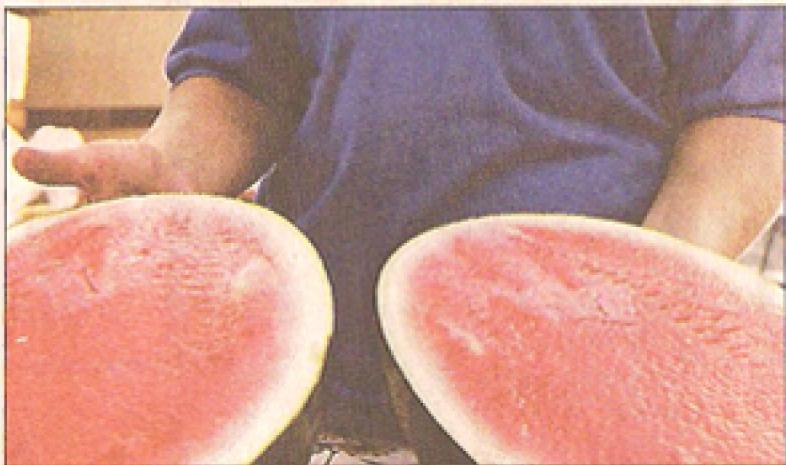


Find the finest rind, melon at the Farmers Market



LOUIS MONTCLAIR/Lincoln Journal Star

Tannie Daniels of Columbus displays some of the seedless watermelons she and her husband, Andy, have for sale at the Haymarket Farmers Market.

This is the last week that Savor offers a taste of something waiting at the Haymarket Farmers Market. The market continues each Saturday morning through October.

BY PATTI VANNOY
Lincoln Journal Star

A bumper crop of summer storms means farmers must struggle to bring in a healthy harvest of melons.

Wind twists the vines and hail explodes melons or damages them slightly, making them more susceptible to disease, said Andy Daniels of Daniels Produce near Columbus.

And Nebraska has had plenty of nasty storms this year, he said, making his challenge of growing watermelon and cantaloupe even

more trying than usual.

Melons are an expensive crop. At about 20 to 22 cents a seed, it costs about \$360 an acre to plant Daniels' 15 acres.

Seedless watermelons also require extra attention because they don't pollinate. A conventional watermelon must be planted about every third plant, said Daniels, who has been growing melons for 18 years.

But all that work produces an oh-so-good summer treat that's available only a couple of months each year.

"It's just a good wholesome food, low in fat and calories," Daniels said.

Daniels' wife, Tannie, is the one who drives the big white truck two hours to Lincoln each Saturday.

The 100 watermelons and 200 cantaloupes she brings usually sell out before the market ends at noon.

"The melons have been excellent the last couple of years," she said, and regular customers began asking after them weeks ago.

The melons are small enough that they can be easily carried to the car, Tannie Daniels said, and they're not too big for a family to eat. The watermelons are about basketball-sized, dark, round and weigh 12 to 14 pounds. The roughly 6-pound cantaloupes are smaller in size.

Her husband said the best way to choose a melon is to hit the field and inspect the vines. Short of that, he laughed, melon seekers should

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CHICKEN SALAD WITH WATERMELON & PEACHES

3 cups chopped cooked chicken
1 cup plain yogurt
½ cup mayonnaise
1 teaspoon dried dill leaf or 1 tablespoon fresh snipped
Juice from 1 fresh lemon
Salt and pepper to taste
2 peaches, seeded and chopped
2 cups chopped seeded watermelon
Mix together the chicken, yogurt, mayonnaise, dill and lemon juice.
Season with salt and pepper to taste. Just before serving, gently
mix in the peach pieces and watermelon pieces. Serve over
greens or inside split minibaguette. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

DANIELS



PRODUCE

Melon

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look for a bright color and no splits, cracks or hail damage.

Watermelon enthusiasts often tap on them, but hearing or feeling no vibration will tell you only whether a melon is overripe, Daniels said; it won't help if it's underripe. Also, avoid bottle-nosed watermelons, he said, because that signifies a pollination problem.

The common trick for cantaloupe is to smell them, but it's a fruitless endeavor because all of the melons smell, he said.

In any case, Daniels recom-

mends buying cantaloupes in advance and leaving them on the kitchen counter for two to three days before eating them, until the back side softens.

Melons should never be stored in the refrigerator, he said, but can be cooled there just before eating.

The Danielses usually eat their melon fresh, simply cut, though Tannie Daniels has frozen bite-size squares of cantaloupe for a cold and sweet after-school treat.

For more motivated melon chefs, here's a recipe for a refreshing summer salad from www.watermelon.org.

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