

Growing Watermelons

Insects and Diseases that may attack Watermelons (see charts at end of document for insects and diseases and solutions)

Planting, Irrigation, and Fertilizing

- Plant seeds and transplants in the garden after all danger of frost has past and soil is at least 70 degrees.
- **I soak the seeds overnight, and then before I plant I soak them in diluted bleach (about 25%) for 30 to 60 minutes, I then rinse off the seeds and allow to them to dry, and then I plant. The diluted bleach solution may also aid in combating certain bacterial diseases. *Note: some people say not to soak watermelon seeds.***
- Plant tall transplants deeply, burying the stem to the first set of leaves.
- Begin transplants in peat pots 3 to 4 weeks before this time.
- ***I don't like transplants-I think it's better to direct sow***
- Most literature says to plant watermelon seeds and plants on mounds (if you do use hills or mounds raise them 3 to 4 inches high and 6 to 12 inches in diameter and space the mounds 2 to 3 feet apart)
But,
- You can have as much success with your watermelons by planting them on flat ground and mulching heavily.
- You can also grow watermelons in a container such as a large pot or grow tub.
- You can even grow watermelons on a trellis. Use an old stocking or some type of elastic that can expand and support the weight of the watermelon as it grows.
- Watermelons are heavy feeders. Make sure your soil is amended properly. You can use compost for this purpose. Also, if using transplants, use a fertilizer starter solution. Use Nitrogen at first, but when the flowers come, use very little nitrogen. You can also enrich the soil by fertilizing with a 10-10-10 fertilizer before planting.
- You may need to side dress watermelon plants later on. Always follow directions.
- Watermelons need at least 6 hours of sunlight every day
- Grow your watermelons on mulch, straw, **or put wood or blocks or hard cardboard underneath the melon** to keep the melon from contacting the soil directly. There are also holders you can purchase.



- Watermelons Vines are most sensitive to drought during the time from planting to when fruits start to form.
- Avoid overhead watering. Soaker hoses or drip irrigation deliver water directly to soil, helping prevent possible spread of fungal diseases among wet foliage.
- Keep soil consistently moist, but not waterlogged, which will kill plants.
- They need 1 to 2 inches of water per week (maybe every 7 to 10 days)
- Water vines early in the morning so leaves can dry before sunset, which will further help prevent fungal diseases.
- **Pruning isn't necessary, but vine productivity may be improved** if you do not allow lateral (side) vines to grow and stick to the main vine. When the plant is young, just cut off the end buds as they form (before the side shoots become vines). You can also pinch off some blossoms to focus the energy on fewer melons (though it's a challenge to kill off a potential fruit!).

Pollination

- Watermelons, as do all cucurbits, have separate male and female flowers.
- Male flowers come out first (they last about 12 days), then female flowers.
- Female flowers can only be fertilized one day (6 to 7 hours) out of the month because they are open for only one day during the growing season.
- You really don't want too many other flowers around that might detract bees away from your watermelon flowers.
- If it's **windy and there are no bees** when the female flower is open, you may need to pollinate by hand.

- Heavily pollinated flowers make larger fruit of more uniform size.



Diseases and remedies to these diseases

- Fungal diseases can multiply rapidly on melon leaves.
- Alternaria leaf spot, anthracnose, and gummy stem blight produce spots on leaves.
- Stem blight also forms bleached or tan sections on stems and rot on fruit.
- Downy mildew causes yellow or pale green leaf spots (we do not really have a problem with that in this area).
- Powdery mildew produces white spots on leaves.
- Treat fungal diseases with fungicides and as a preventative.
- Use of **Milk** (30 -40 % milk to 60 -70% water) as a preventative-Spray when it's warm.

Seedless Varieties

- If you plant seedless watermelons, always use a pollinator such as a sugar baby variety.

How to tell when watermelons are ripe

- When the Tendril on the vine is Brown
- When the underside of the melon is a nice yellow color
- The Thump test
- The Old Smell Test

How to get the sweetest watermelons

About a week or so (I do about two weeks) before the watermelons are ripe, cut the watering down to a bare minimum – Only enough to keep the vines from wilting.

Chart of Watermelon Pests and Possible Solutions

Watermelon Pest	Treatment
Aphids	Insecticidal soap, Neem oil extract
Armyworms	Bacillus thuringiensis, Spinosad
Crickets	Protective Cones or Row Covers
Cutworms	Protective collars or <i>B.t.</i> mixed with molasses & grain as a bait
Cucumber beetles	Difficult to manage. Protective Covers
Darkling beetles	Remove or hasten the breakdown of organic matter to reduce the available host
Driedfruit beetles	Trap in containers with an inverted cone top. Destroy decaying watermelons
Earwigs	Spinosad, (e.g. Sluggo Plus, or Spinosad sprays)
Flea beetles	Carbaryl sprays. Insecticidal soap, Neem oil extract, horticultural oil, pyrethrin
Grasshoppers	In heavy infestations use Carbaryl. Plant a green grass border around garden to deter.
Leafhoppers	Control is rarely needed. Insecticidal soap or narrow range oil may help
Leafminers	Protective cloth or natural parasites
Loopers	Handpick. Bacillus thuringiensis or Spinosad
Seedcorn maggot	Avoid over fertilization with manure. Protective cloth or protect individual plants
Spider mites	Insecticidal soap, horticultural oil
Squash bug	Handpick. Insectidal soap or Neem oil
Stink bugs	Handpick bugs. Parasites and General Predators
Thrips	Spinosad
Whiteflies	Insecticidal soap, Neem oil extract, pyrethrin, horticultural oil, yellow sticky traps
Wireworms	Plant carrots, every two to three days pull up the carrots which have worms attached