



Watermelon Planting Guide

About Watermelons

Watermelon is a sweet, commonly consumed fruit of summer. They grow in climates from tropical to temperate, requiring temperatures higher than 77 degrees F to thrive. Watermelon is often eaten by the slice, diced in mixed fruit salads, or enjoyed as a juice. Additionally, the seeds have a nutty flavor and are often dried and roasted for a crunchy summer snack.

When to Plant

If you live in a climate with a short growing season, consider starting your watermelon seeds indoors 4-6 weeks before transplanting seedlings into the garden. Sow watermelon seeds directly, or set out your transplants 3-4 weeks after the last average frost date in spring.

Where to Plant

Watermelon demands full sun and warm temperature -- both soil and air. Transplant or direct sow seeds only when the average soil and daytime air temperatures are at least 70 degrees F. Watermelons are heavy feeders and require soil rich in nutrients. They grow best in loose, well-drained, but moisture-retentive soil rich in organic matter. Amend your soil with aged manure, seaweed, and/or compost before planting.

How to Plant

Dig a hole 12" deep and 24" wide, fill with compost, manure, and several handfuls of sand. Use the soil that was removed from the hole to create the mound and then sow your seed or transplant there. Sow watermelon seeds 1" deep, planting 4-6 seeds (or transplanting 2-3 of your strongest seedlings) in mounds that stretch 24" across. If direct sowing, wait until seedlings have developed 3-4 true leaves and choose your strongest 2-3 plants by cutting the thinned out seedlings at soil level with scissors. Build mounds 5-10' apart.

Caring for Watermelons

Use a nitrogen fertilizer until flowers form. Then, switch to a high phosphorus and potassium fertilizer like liquid seaweed. Keep area well weeded and if needed, mulch around the base to ensure moisture retention. Watermelons are 95% water and require plentiful, even watering for consistent growth. Keep the soil moist and avoid letting the vine itself become dry, until fruit reaches full size, then stop watering while the fruit ripens. You may want to place a board under each melon to keep the fruit clean and dry. Watermelons will be ready to harvest after 70-90 days from sowing. Most people tap their watermelons and listen for a dull thump to know when the fruit is ripe. Other maturation signs include the ceasing of growth, the yellowing of the underside and the drying of the stem near the fruit's base.