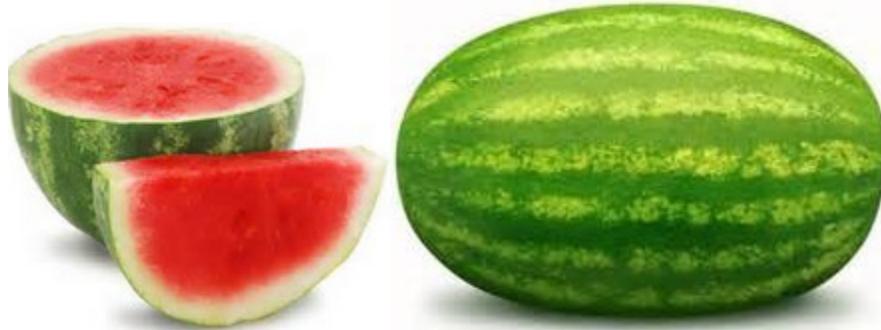


## *Watermelon Growing in Parker County*



In Parker County, watermelons should be set in the ground in early spring when the threat of frost has passed. Another indicator of proper timing: the soil temperature should be at least 70°F. Ideal growing locations for watermelons have sunny, hot days with temperatures between 80 - 95°F, and warm nights with temperatures in the 65-70°F range. Note: One of the best ways to keep the air and soil warm on a frosty day is to cover the watermelon patch using floating row cover.

Watermelon seeds should be planted between 3/4 inch and 1-inch deep, the AgriLife Extension reports. The plants need between 10-15 inches of water throughout the growing season and do best when given 1-2 inches of water every 10-14 days. Make sure there is ample air circulation around the selected spot.

A sandy, fertile loam that retains moisture but is well-drained is the best soil for watermelons. You can prepare the soil by adding manure, compost, and dead leaves and blending these well with the soil by tilling.

If you are using seeds, soak them for a few minutes prior to sowing. Make small hills in the watermelon patch. Plant a couple of seeds in each hill by making a hole of 1-inch. If you are using transplants, carefully remove them from the pot in which they were initially grown. Slowly place them in 1-2 inch deep holes.

Keep the watermelon patch clean. Once a week, add a slow-release fertilizer. The size of the fruit depends upon the fertility of the soil. Reduce the usage of nitrogen fertilizers once the watermelon plants start to flower. However, add potassium and phosphorous fertilizers until the harvest time.

Watermelons should be ready to harvest 85-95 days after planting from seed or 65-75 days after planting from seedlings, to the touch. Some popular varieties of watermelon include Charleston Gray, Crimson Sweet, Sugar Baby and Black Diamond.

### **Knowing whether a watermelon is ripe enough to be harvested:**

- If the curly tendrils near a watermelon have turned brown, it is a clue the melon is ripe.
- Another clue is the underside of a watermelon would turn creamy color, from light green, if it is ready for harvest. When the melons are ripe, their green skin becomes duller and rougher to the touch.
- Another clue is, thumping a watermelon. If it is ripe, you would hear a dull and hollow sound.

### **Diseases of Watermelons:**

- Blossom end rot will cause the end of the watermelon to turn black and rot, creating sunken areas on the fruit. This creates conditions for a secondary organism to invade, which may spread the rot throughout the fruit, including black rot or belly rot.

Blossom rot results from a lack of calcium. The soil may be deficient in calcium, or dry soil may limit the availability of calcium to the plant's roots. Soil conditions that fluctuate between dry and wet may also limit calcium availability. Belly rot, or black rot, is spread by fungi, which invade fruit that has been damaged or split, either by the presence of other conditions, such as blossom rot, or by resting on excessively wet soil.

- Anthracnose, a disease that first affects the foliage of the watermelon vine, eventually advances to the fruit; young fruits turn black, shrivel and die, older fruits develop circular lesions ¼- 2½ -inches in diameter that progressively turn dark green-black and ooze. Anthracnose is caused by the fungus *Colletotrichum orbiculare*; damp and rainy conditions may aid its spread in areas where it is present.

### **Control of Diseases in Watermelons:**

To prevent the spread of anthracnose, avoid cultivating watermelon vines when they are wet with rain or dew; apply fungicides as needed. Remove all affected fruit and destroy them. Consult your local county extension agent for more recommendations. Applications of calcium to the plant's foliage may help with blossom rot. Belly rot or black rot can be controlled by staking or caging fruits to keep them from direct contact with wet soil.

### **Prevention:**

Plant watermelons in well-drained soil. Test the soil for sufficient calcium before planting and add lime if needed. Your local county extension agent can provide soil testing kits and recommendations for soil amendments, if required. Use certified disease-free seed and choose disease resistant varieties. Keep the soil evenly moist at all times, particularly when the

watermelons first begin to develop. Water to supplement rainfall so the vines receive 1-2 inches of water per week, especially during dry spells. Apply mulch around the plants to help maintain soil moisture and prevent weeds.

**The following are common questions about watermelon growing:**

**Why do my watermelons crack while still on the vine?**

Water can be the enemy of fruit about to mature. Consistent, even irrigation is important in the last two weeks of growth. Over-irrigating before melons ripen can cause them to split on the vine. Heavy rain just before harvest is also a reason watermelons crack. Persistent drought followed by a large rain will cause a lot of nutrients to enter the fruit, which makes the flesh grow much faster than the skin and can lead to cracking.

**Deer are eating my watermelon crop how can I prevent this?**

Raccoons, coyotes and deer are highly attracted to ripe watermelons. About the only way to keep deer out is by a high fence, although you might try a single-wire electric fence.

**Should I stop watering melons a period before harvesting?**

About a week before a melon is ripe, water only as necessary to keep vines from wilting. Withholding water causes sugars to concentrate in the fruit. Too much water reduces sweetness.

