



Growing up in the Hawkesbury district, watermelons meant summer - hot dry dusty days, school holidays and no shoes worn for weeks on end. Watermelons were grown on the rich land bordering the Hawkesbury River, where they grew into huge lozenge shaped fruit, pale green in colour splashed dotted and striped with darker green. The flesh was crystalline and sugary in texture oozing juice, and with lots of black seeds which we also chewed (they are high in protein).

As with many of our vegetables, this old cultivar is rarely seen today – however I have tracked it down and seed of ‘war paint’ may be bought on line from succeedheirlooms.com.au and from Greenpatch. In Nowra, Berry Street Seed and Produce stock Eden Seeds who have one called ‘Charleston Grey’, another similar heirloom one.

How to Grow: Watermelons like an open sunny spot and fertile soil with good drainage. Prepare the site first by digging in some compost, blood and bone and chicken manure pellets. Sow three or four seeds in a small hill about 3cm deep. Water well and they will germinate in about a week. Thin to the two strongest seedlings. Sow seed now and fruit should be ready to pick in 12-16 weeks. Water regularly then only occasionally when the melons near maturity. A watermelon is ripe when the attached stem withers and dies and a rap with the knuckles emits a hollow ring.

How to Use: While a wedge of fresh watermelon is delicious, it is a versatile fruit for salads, desserts and drinks. Blended with a teaspoon of rosewater it makes a lovely frozen granita. The white section beneath the skin may be used to make a delicious melon and ginger or melon and lemon jam.

A tasty salsa may be made with a handful or two of diced watermelon, cherry tomatoes, Lebanese cucumbers, spring onions, black olives and fetta dressed with red wine vinegar to taste.

A favourite dish at our house is:

Asian Style Watermelon Salad

Ingredients:

- 300-400g watermelon in 2cm cubes
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped coriander
- Juice of half a lime
- 1½ tablespoons fish sauce (Squid brand is a good one)
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger
- ½ a red chilli finely chopped
- 1 cup desiccated coconut

170g coconut sugar

1½ cups hot water

Method:

Place watermelon cubes in a bowl and toss with lime juice and chilli.

Toast the coconut in a dry pan until a fragrant light brown.

Grate the coconut sugar and add to the water, bring to a simmer and cook until syrupy (about 5 minutes)

Take off the heat, add the ginger, fish sauce and the coconut

Allow to cool a little and pour over the watermelon, sprinkle on the coriander and toss gently.

This salad is positively addictive; serve as an entrée or with seafood or chicken.